Memory Stitches:
A Painterly Exploration of Migratory Dowry

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Declaration of Originality

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the thesis, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the thesis, nor does the thesis contain any material that infringes copyright.

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The research associated with this thesis abides by the international and Australian codes on human and animal experimentation, the guidelines by the Australian Government's Office of the Gene Technology Regulator and the rulings of the Safety, Ethics and Institutional Biosafety Committees of the University.

Elizabeth Joan Gray

Dedication

My immeasurable appreciation is for the courageous migrant women who generously shared with me their stories, photographs, dowry collections and unlimited cakes and coffee. They will continue to manifest in my memory.

This thesis is dedicated to my precious family – my mother Joan Lucy and to Sarajane, Anthony, Colleen and Ellie Lada.

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Name Elizabeth Joan Gray

Other Degrees

2014 – Bachelor of Fine Art with First Class Honours, University of Tasmania.

2013 – Master of Fine Art and Design, University of Tasmania.

2000 – Bachelor Degree of Adult and Vocational Education, University of Tasmania.

1982 – Bachelor Fine Art (Visual), University of Tasmania.

Abstract

Memory stitches: a painterly exploration of migratory dowry

This research project uses painting to explore the untold narratives associated with dowry objects belonging to post Second World War migrant women who reside in Tasmania. It has aimed to transpose dowry items from precious objects, hidden from everyday view, into a series of painted images that evoke the complex cultural, historical and personal significance of dowry. Based on interviews with migrant women about their dowry, the

project has reassessed the meaning and importance of dowry as a significant aspect of migration history in Tasmania. It interprets migratory dowry through the key themes of history, culture, memory, nostalgia and loss, and gives recognition to a cultural practice that is gradually declining.

Traditional European matrilineal dowries were the material foundation for the establishment of a new family, and represented the continuation of cultural heritage, social status and bride-wealth. They were commonly comprised of everyday domestic objects such as woven, stitched and embroidered tablecloths and bed linen. Motivated by the personal stories attached to dowry and my own emigration story, I have created a suite of paintings that aim to challenge the perception that dowry has become a mere token of the migration experience.

The context of the project has been informed by the work of artists who have explored migration experiences, cloth and stitching in their Still Life genre practice. These include Rachel Ruysch's historical paintings of floral imagery, Alison Watt's contemporary representations of folded and textured cloths, Aleks Danko's paintings of stitched cultural patterns and Elisa Markes-Young's mixed media works that incorporate thread. These and other artists have created works about cloth, stitching and migration, however, my research has specifically focussed on the dowry objects of Tasmanian migrants.

Key texts that informed the research include Roszika Parker's history of embroidery, Maria Tence and Elizabeth Triarico's explanation of European dowry customs and Edvige Giunta and Joseph Sciorra's interpretations of the symbolism of botanical and geometric embroidery adornment. Ilaria Vanni explores the role dowry objects played in migrant resettlement and Margaret Gibson reflects on memory and biography embedded in personal objects. Nicola Waugh and Svetlana Boym clarify the historical and contemporary meaning of nostalgia embedded in objects. All these authors explain how the key concepts of memory, nostalgia, loss and migration are attached to dowry, and also confirm the decline of migratory dowry, which reinforced my commitment to the project and gave it a sense of urgency.

The thesis paintings depict the embroidered dowry linen objects of Tasmanian migrant women, using linen as a substrate to reinforce the materiality of dowry, a *paint-for-stitch* process to replicate embroidery techniques and a focus on the figure-ground relationship to emphasise individual dowry motifs. As these and other strategies progressed, the paintings became more complex to convey the layering of memory and nostalgia associated with dowry and the waning of dowry practices. The thesis demonstrates that painting can powerfully evoke the multiplicity of meanings embedded in dowries.

Frontispiece

My interest in the precious belongings and attached stories of elder migrants living in Tasmania is motivated by life experience. A sixth generation Tasmanian, as a child I lived in a suburb of predominantly newly arrived post Second World War migrants. As a young woman, I trained and worked among migrants as a textile designer. I married a refugee who had fled the 1956 Hungarian uprising. Together we left Tasmania in 1970 with our baby son to visit his elderly parents in Russian occupied Hungary. With their city home and contents confiscated by the Communist Regime, they lived in a tiny dwelling in an isolated village. It had rudimentary electricity, no connected water and was situated on the edge of the great Hortobagy Plains where Russian barracks housed soldiers, armoured tanks and fighter jets – ready for war. An incident resulted in us being placed under house arrest with his parents who were openly politically democratic in a communist led country. After four months confinement we escaped and returned to Tasmania.

I did not leave the safety of Tasmania again until 2002, when I left behind family and friends to live in Italy. I departed with one suitcase of clothes, a few sentimental items and a small computer. Having no foreign language skills or networks, no job, place of abode or hotel arranged, I registered as an immigrant in Italy and was granted 12 years' residency. Working as an artist and managing a bed and breakfast establishment, I lived amongst another culture's history, language, traditions, art, literature and food in several communities, and engaged with the local customs and dialects of these towns

and villages by working as an artist. Yearning for Tasmania and family, I returned five years later with an enhanced insight into another culture and language, and an abundance of unforgettable experiences as a migrant who chose to emigrate.

These experiences led to research projects within the *Bachelor of Fine Arts with Honours* and *The Master of Fine Art and Design* programs at the School of Creative Arts, University of Tasmania. For these two significant projects and resultant exhibitions, the projects were painterly explorations of mementos and souvenirs belonging to migrants residing in Tasmania. In 'Mementos of Displacement' (2011), I concentrated on functional household objects hurriedly grabbed by families during the last moments before fleeing advancing enemy armies during the Second World War and later brought to Tasmania.

'Souvenirs of Displacement' (2014) was an extension of the previous project, examining what souvenirs migrants chose to bring back to Tasmania after a first return visit to their home country, and where I explored the symbolic potential of souvenirs as vessels for memory, myth, nostalgia and loss. These paintings of mementos and souvenirs function as oblique portraits of the migrant participants and are an *aid-memoir* for the absent and irrecoverable in their lives.

The investigation

Introduction

Through my studio works I explore how the act of painting can represent dowry, and produce images that transpose migratory dowry from inert objects to transcendent motifs of historical migration and cultural relocation.

This project is an extension of my 2014 Honours research where I collected stories and images of cherished objects belonging to migrants living in Tasmania, and transposed them into painterly icons. With a lifetime spent interrelating with migrants (*Frontispiece*), I resumed my investigation into migratory objects because of their waning historical importance, probable dispersion and loss.

The basis of my research was a series of interviews with migrant women residing in Tasmania. Due to this research project's set timeline and practical realities, I fixed the number of participants at 12. The limited number of women chosen for this project was not randomly selected. They were invited into the project because they were women I knew to have experienced migration and who had retained a significant collection of their personal dowry objects and expressed a willingness to share their stories with me. Realising this low number of participants would limit the variance of dowry objects, I chose participants from different nations, Italy, Greece, Hungary, England, Finland, Belgium and Latvia. Aware that most of the participants were in the later part of their lives, and within a short time their stories may be lost and their dowry objects

dispersed, my conversations with some family members of these women ensured dowry collections would be honoured as heirlooms for another generation at least.

The main requirement of the interviews with the women was a shared interest in migratory dowry collections. It was necessary that I and the women shared a common ground of knowledge and background and were interested in taking their migration experiences and dowry descriptions further to open up and expand on the reasons for the interviews. When visiting these women in their homes where the heirloom and dowry objects were stored, I had numerous conversations where they presented invaluable and diverse historical, cultural and biographical narratives pertaining to their dowry collections, and imparted critical interpretations of dowry and embroidered motifs (Fig. 01). I used these stories and my photographic images of their dowry collections and transposed in paint dowry cloths stitched with geometrical and florae imagery and expressed their migratory experiences through threads unravelling, falling stitched motifs and frayed edges.

(Fig. 01) © *Migrant woman's dowry objects*, c. 1948, image, Elizabeth Gray.

The stitched imagery on dowry linens and cloth speaks of biography, loss and nostalgic memory. My project intention was to create a suite of paintings that reinterpret migratory journeys and dowry belonging to these women.

As a result, this project, *Memory Stitches: A Painterly Exploration of Migratory Dowry*, is based on an exploration of a small aspect of Tasmania's important 20th century migration history [1].

The project has created 9 completed paintings. It has involved the development of a particular painting technique (*paint-for-stitch*) that placed me in a situation similar to those women who spent so much time embroidering their dowry objects. The associated theoretical research has uncovered how images of material and cloth have been painted and for what purposes. It has explored how paintings of cloth have been used historically to represent the lived experience of women. As the sequence of paintings was created so my research foci evolved, necessitating an exploration of the concept of nostalgia. I began to explore how I could engage 'the nostalgic' to connect the painter, viewer and the subject of each painting to unfold, and crystallise into an image of 12 women's experiences of migration.

While dowries have been important in the lives of women migrants, they are now considered impractical and often seen as valueless tokens of the immigration experience.

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[1] The terms *migratory* dowry and *migration* refer to the women participants leaving their place of origin to travel to a foreign place, both in culture and lingua.

Yet significantly, a dowry carries the identity of the maker and cultural connections that affirm a woman's right to ancestral and cultural reclamations.

Author Francine De Bonneville (1994) laments the disregard for stitched cloth and believes the popular modern synthetic material that substitutes for organic cloth can produce a shift in values because it is easily disposable, unlike authentic cotton, hemp and linen used in the making of dowry that '…bear the trace of human contact in its folds. People remain etched in its fibres long after they have departed' (p. 200).

A Western perspective on dowry

Bridal dowry must be enough to last a lifetime. This was the advice given by generations of European women to their daughters. A traditional matrilineal dowry was commonly comprised of everyday domestic objects, inherited or made for the future marital home. It included woven and embroidered tablecloths and runners, curtains, bed linen and covers, hand towels and doilies, intimate apparel, bridal frocks and wedding regalia. In the 21st century dowry is often considered archaic yet the migrant women involved in this project honour and celebrate the cultural and emotional links attached to their traditional dowry.

Dowry was part of the formal process denoting a marriage and an important kinship between families of the prospective bride and groom. It provided the

material foundation for the establishment of a new family and represented a continuation of cultural heritage. Dowries also reflected the social status and the worth of the fiancée, with some dowry items handed down from the grandmother–to–mother–to–daughter as decreed by marriage customs. While marriage customs have changed in the 21st century, dowry objects represent the past and traditionally move into the future as heirlooms to be honoured.

Dowry was also bound to the ritualistic events of life such as christenings, church confirmations, engagements and marriages and, finally, the burying of the deceased wrapped in embroidered linen and lace shrouds; all these events were charged with potent emotional and symbolic value. Dowry collections revealed the imprint of duration and were embedded with the trace of events the items were made for. Also entrenched within the dowry objects were deep cultural forms and rites that continue to this day in our culture, therefore representing dowry in my paintings is not just about the past but also highlights persistent dowry customs still practised by a few migrant women.

Dowry objects are inscribed with a myriad of stitches that form personalised monograms of the owners and stitched floriferous gardens plus geometric designs, and are often filled with rich meanings and cultural imagery that denoted their ancestries. In this way, these dowry collections are archives of stitched iconography encoded as an everyday potent reminder of the sacredness of love, virtue, marriage, family, life and death. For the women who participated

in my project, their dowry objects, imbued with memory and nostalgia, are key symbols in the construction of their migratory stories and the inspiration that forms the basis for my submitted works.

Migratory history

While key source material for my project came from the migrant women's interviews and their private collections of dowry objects, my project was also informed by various publications relating to post Second World war immigration to Australia. Further information was obtained from Italian and Greek Society Journals and historical and contemporary articles on migratory objects and the role dowry played in migrant re-settlement.

Material from the tome edited by James Jupp (2001) contributed to my understanding of Australia's history of migration and gave credence to my research. The journal article by Maria Tence and Elizabeth Triarico (1999) explained the importance of dowry collections in Australian/Italian migrant families and Maria Palaktsoglou, (2013) clarified the contents of a typical European dowry. Susi Bella Wardrop (1996) presented extensive research into the migration of proxy brides and Zlatko Skrbis (2017 explained the migratory term and the role of 'wharf-side brides'.

Most importantly, the authors, Edviga Giunta and Joseph Sciorra (2014) gave their interpretations of migratory history, discussed the importance of

embroidered iconography, exposed the emotional power of nostalgia and memory encoded in dowry and revealed how dowry acts as a cultural touchstone embedded in the migratory experience. These authors required me to consider what is meant by nostalgia, to clarify what I mean by nostalgia and how I engage it in this project. They iterate that nostalgia can be interpreted in different ways, from the vapid nostalgia for a romanticised past that did not exist, to the nostalgic understanding that we are all connected to and emerge from our past lives to become more socially and culturally aware humans. In my paintings I intended to see nostalgia as a complex aspect of human existence that can trigger related emotions such as memories of loss and a sense of displacement that intensify the desire to 'look back' to earlier times.

Nostalgia

Because I made the assumption that nostalgia is irrevocably entwined with the migrant participants' dowry objects, I used transcripts of the migrant women's conversations (*Appendices* pp. 145 – 168) to inform my writing and paintings. When I initially structured the interview/question format at the beginning of this project, I was unaware of the significant role nostalgia would play in my paintings. Although I gained no direct quote referring to nostalgia from the interviewees, it was evidence by the emotions the women expressed when illuminating their migratory stories and handling their precious dowry objects.

An author who explains how nostalgia is made manifest is Susan Stewart (1993) who states that '…nostalgia does not exist without loss' and offers an explanation drawn from Freudian discourse that '…nostalgia is a sadness that creates longing because it is not part of a lived experience' (p. 145).

Svetlana Boym (2007) defines nostalgia thus: '*nostos* – meaning return home and *algia* – as longing' (p.09). Because nostalgia is such a personal affective emotion, this author equates nostalgia with loss and displacement and with romantic notions of other places and times that become one's own fantasy. The author also asserts nostalgia is both a physical and a spiritual longing – an essential human condition for the continuity of culture and memory of home. Boym suggests that migrant's stories are the best narratives of nostalgia '…because immigrants understand the limitations of nostalgia and the tenderness of what I call 'diasporic intimacy' (p. 15).

Describing nostalgia as being a woven fabric of memory, Nicola Waugh (2010) proposes the relationship between past memories attached to objects cannot exist without the concept of nostalgia. 'Because nostalgia is such a bodily experience, it tends to be overlooked in most academic discourse in favour of memory in general' (p. 05). Waugh also refers to Janelle Wilson's (2005) study wherein the author proposes memory and nostalgia are emotionally linked to longing. These emotions '…are instrumental in one's quest to know who one is.' (p. 35).

Sociologist, Fred Davis (1979), writes comprehensively about nostalgia and memory and claims nostalgia's influence is most positive at transitional points in life for it is not an ordinary memory, rather it is a particular form of recollection. Davis also states '…although nostalgia draws from the past, it is quite clearly a product of the present because it is evoked by current …anxieties' (p. 146). Querying whether factual memories are less important than the emotive thoughts behind nostalgia, Olivier Rieter (2015) interviewed Sociologist Janelle Wilson regarding her (2005) study wherein Wilson suggests that factual truth of memory is not as important as '… why the past is remembered in the way it is'. Wilson contends that through recollection we '…play with the past, …selectively remember things …and actively construct meaning' (p. 01).

As nostalgia is the tension between memory and longing entangled with a sense of loss, I have expressed nostalgia in my paintings through the reinterpretation of the migrant women's stories and their personal dowry items. I have used background images of painted cloth overlaid with shadows and clouds and tangled net to intensify the embroidered imagery using a combination of powerful and fragile colours in a figurative language. The fragmentation of dowry via unpicked stitches, the unravelling of threads on aged worn cloth with stains of use and frayed edges stimulate the intensity of nostalgia in these paintings.

Memory, biography and loss

Because dowry invites the touching and unfolding of cloth and the tracing of stitches with a finger, tactile encounters with dowry can open up intimate memories and reminders of the loss of centuries of tradition as dowry acquires new meaning when removed from a known cultural location. Memory is pattern and migration can disturb these intricate neurons. Yet these memory stitches linked to nostalgia are the emotive elements needed to protect migratory dowry collections to ensure they remain with family as precious heirlooms. I sought authors and poets whose writings are linked to emotive objects. Gaston Bachelard (1994) speaks of memories of wardrobes and armoires filled with stacks of dowry. Ilaria Vanni (2013) expands on Bachelard's statement by relating nostalgic memories and the loss of historical and cultural connections to the important role dowry objects played in migrant women's resettlement. Joan Gibbons (2007) explores 'memory-work' in the arts, explains the role dowry objects played in migrant resettlement and discusses memory as trace and art as biography and Belinda Von Mengerson (2014) views stitching as a metaphor for the repetitive nature of ritual participation.

Dowry collections are essential cultural objects that make possible the domestication of unfamiliar places and often empty living spaces awaiting the newly arrived women migrants. Margaret Gibson (2008) and Anne Hecht (2001) both argue from different perspectives that special collections of objects kept in the home are invested with meaning, memory and biography.

Other authors analyse the symbolic and emotive core of objects and contemplate the biographies they carry, such as Rebecca Solnit (1998) and Christopher Allen (2016). Lydia Rostek (2015) explains the complex geometrical ornamentation of Ukrainian stitching, Kirstin Swan (2008) discusses the elision of space internal and external to painting and Olga Viso (2013) speaks of poetic musings related to art. These authors and poets contributed to the development of my project and extended my understanding of biography, memory, loss and the nostalgic geographies of home associated with dowry collections. Craig Owens (1994) informed my painting processes and clarified how to experiment within the boundaries between illusion and reality and Lucy Somers' (2010) enlightened for me the historical implications of the still life genre in the context of contemporary art.

Stitching dowry

Each time I viewed a migrant women's dowry collection I was presented with a diverse range of hand stitched dowry revealing cultural imagery with marks of imperfections, domestic use and time evident on these items that are continually aging. Some of these items reveal faded coloured threads, the stains of making and use, marks of the unpicked stitches, frayed edges, unravelling threads and areas incomplete. While some designs are symmetrical, most are multi-coloured botanical images stitched on linen and sheer fabrics using a myriad of stitches and knots to create historical, cultural and personal embroidered symbols.

More than thirty years ago, Roszika Parker (1984) de-constructed beliefs around embroidery being a female domestic craft and re-presented it as powerful individual acts of subversion through stitched autobiographical story telling. Parker's revelations about the cultural practices of embroidery exposed historical and contemporary domestic embroidery to academic enquiry and clarified where stitching skills were learned and where embroidery now fits within the arts.

A dowry began with a young girl's simple examples of stitched patterns on cloth. These utilitarian samplers were a means of learning and recording stitch forms and embroidery patterns that prepared girls for dutiful piety, essential household darning and the important creation of a bridal dowry.[2] The girls' embroidery skills started with a simple sampler. Underpinning the visual images I employed in my still life painterly version of migratory samplers was Anne Sebba's (1979) historical research. The author gives a comprehensive history of samplers and also includes contemporary artists who employ traditional women's craft in the making of them.

[2] Derived from the Latin '*exemplum*', samplers were either a square or a long scroll of cloth containing various traditional and personally designed stitched creations. Samplers often took years to complete due to the mathematical precision, concentration and endurance needed for complex patterns. When completed the sampler became either a wall hanging or rolled up and stored for future stitch and design reference.

Carol Humphrey (1997) focuses on traditional samplers as a school learning tool for numerical and alphabetical skills and a means for recording stitch and design creations and Maria–Alina Asavei (2015) examines the nostalgic qualities of the dowry sampler

Still life artists

This project has been influenced by particular still life artists ranging from the 17th century Italian and Dutch painters to contemporary art that focus on the object, particularly artists who evoke the nostalgic effects of history, memory, migration and culture in their work. I deemed to merge the historical tradition of the still life genre with a contemporary mode, for still life has always endured in an artistic climate that is captivated by the essence of objects.

Lucia Tomasi and Gretchen Hirschauer, in their (2002) National Gallery of Washington exhibition catalogue, proclaim that 17th century botanical paintings influenced embroidery designs for several centuries. The migrant women's 20th century embroidery patterns can be compared with botanical illustrations of the Italian artist Jacopo Ligozzi (1547–1626) who painted naturalistic botanical imagery designed specifically for embroidered ceremonial fabrics and decorative inlaid tops for tables. A 17th century botanical painter, Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750), expanded the imagery of Ligozzi in her still life paintings of flowers and insects by using asymmetrical compositions that appear spontaneous and contain, beauty, energy and realism in vibrant colours. That

her florae imagery has been interpreted in stitch on a few of the migrant women's 20th century dowry items reinforced my desire to recreate contemporary painterly visions of these historical floral images stitched on their dowry.

Frances Woodley (2014) links the still life genre to poetry and asserts '…the mystery in a still life painting is missing if poetry is absent' (p. 07). Phyllis Capello's poem, the poetic words of Mark Doty (2001) combined with Andrew David King's (2012) reflections on Doty's poetry, have been influential in the way I transpose poetic images in my still life paintings.

Still life painting as a genre historically contained religious and allegorical symbolism mingled with the depiction of botanical and banquet imagery as well as precious and domestic objects. While contemporary still life has moved beyond mostly paintings and now includes three-dimensional mixed media, photography, video and sound, I have retained in my works the traditional painterly affects that expose the exquisite botanical imagery and the emotive marks of duration of these dowry objects.

Artists of influence

For many centuries painters have captured certain qualities within objects and have brought them to life in particular ways. To realise this project, I have used a range of techniques associated with still life, such as illusion and imitation to

promote the physical presence of dowry objects, painterly representations of dowry to turn the commonplace into desirable dowry objects to encourage reflection and the reinterpretation of these migratory objects.

The submitted paintings of the women's dowry were created on a linen base to emphasise the cloth of dowry. Cloth has always functioned as a bearer of meaning because stitching is traditionally made through the touch and the needle pressure of the stitcher, who knows cloth in an intimate way. Painting images of cloth-on-cloth is the method Alison Watt (b. 1965) uses to explore the folds and textures of cloth. This artist informed the way I created painterly migratory dowry to ensure that the weave of my linen also became the weave of the painted dowry objects. This was a purposeful strategy to reinforce a sense of thread and cloth within my paintings. Watt paints in oils onto a textured canvas base to create large white unframed paintings of cloth folds that appear to overflow onto white walls, creating a physical connection between the cloth, the painter and the viewer. Her images continually reminded me to connect with the linen base and create meaningful space in my paintings to allow for moments of quiet contemplation.

Akin to my painterly interpretation of migratory experiences through disrupted stitches and unravelling threads on a cloth base that express memory, Elisa Markes-Young (b. 1965) translates into and on the cloth, needlework and lace-like patterns relating to the fragmented memory of migration experiences, This

artist extends meaning through complex time-consuming cross-cultural images in mixed media, interspersed with needlework that represents the events of the displaced through broken threads, missed stitches and imperfections that speak of loss.

Revealing duration and implying that stories lie within, the poignant black and white photographs of J. John Priola (b. 1960) focuses on lone and small groups of domestic objects imbued with the ability to recall memories that equate with the migrant women's dowry objects. His images inspired me to interpret dowry as memory objects that evoke pathos and biography that tells of the conditions in which they were created and how they now exist.

Aleks Danko (b. 1950) and Sylvia Griffin (b. not known) have both emulated their mothers' migration experiences in their works. Danko has translated traditional designs, from embroidered cushion covers made by his Ukrainian mother and friends, into multiple gouaches on paper containing complex geometrical ornamentation that focussed on the migrant experience and the significance of particular objects associated with post-war migrants in Australia. My *paint–for–stitch* strategy I have developed specifically for the painting of dowry's embroidered images to personally experience the skill and dedication needed to create a painted impression, as if stitched with thread, is similar to Griffin's dedicated approach. This artist uses tiny quartz stones to replace each stitch of an embroidered dowry object from her mother's collection to recreate a

contemplative and cathartic installation. Relative to Griffin's installation, Jim Hodges (b. 1957) also simulated embroidery by using acts reminiscent of dowry labour – assembly, disassembly, folding and unfolding, pinning and unpinning in his installation of silk flowers dispersed across a gallery wall. It was Hodges' installation that influenced my painterly expression of embroidered images flying free from the dowry folds, to symbolise migrant women seeking release from the making and caring of dowry.

All these artists have worked in the still life genre using a range of media. While Watt has created images of cloth using paint, I used the painterly cloth imagery as a base for embellished dowry imagery. J. John Priola's monochrome images of lone objects and domestic assemblages evoked the sentiments of memory and nostalgia I included in my paintings. Hodges' installation released simulated stitched imagery that inspired me to set free the migrant women's obligations to dowry and Danko, Griffin and Markes-Young referenced cultural practices associated with dowry in their work I transposed into my interpretation of migratory dowry. All these artists, in various ways, strongly influenced my methodology for this series of migratory dowry paintings.

Painting strategies

Seeking to understand the artistic merits of my paintings, Gordon Graham (2005) clarifies how art contributes significantly to human understanding and suggests it is only after an artwork is completed does the artist grasp its depth of

meaning. The author suggests it is essential that artworks '…take the form of imaginative creations that can be brought to everyday experience as a way of ordering and illuminating it' (p. 74). Expanding on Graham's theories, J. G Knowles (2007) deems art making, as a research method, can make for creative experiences using one's imaginings to find new ways of knowing that it is difficult to articulate through traditional research processes. The author states imaginative methods can '…potentially provide a richer context and experience of the subject being investigated' (p. 549).

Completing my research into the migrant women's dowry items and their attached migration stories, I began translating these objects from memory markers into images using the still life genre. The structure of linen weave became the background to painterly stitched samplers, folded and stacked dowry objects, free–floating stitched imagery, and lace and net painted over stencilled backdrop cloth. Like painting, embroidery is a cumulative process that builds on its support cloth surface. Because the painting of embroidery remains flat on the surface of the painting rather than within and of the cloth base, I developed my *paint-for-stitch* process to emulate, stitch by stitch in various thread types and colours, embroidered shapes using small brush strokes overlapping each other to create depth and enhance colours. This process worked best by painting each stitch layer over dry paint to eliminate muddy colours and smudged stitches. To give the appearance of depth in the embroidered motifs, I painted subtle outlines of transparent *Raw Umber* to

create shadow. I used this *paint-for-stitch* strategy in all my paintings to represent the myriad stitches that created the embroidered botanical and geometric shapes, incorporating layers of threads stitched tight, unravelling threads and fragmentary marks of unfinished embroidery work.

The painting strategies I sought and used enriched my understanding of the role dowry objects play in migrants' lives. I transposed the cultural and personal symbolism embedded within dowry items from inert precious objects, hidden from everyday view, into painterly stitched imagery and patterns on cloth. When replicating the embroidered dowry images in paint, the positioning of each stitch was vital in the type of thread, either cotton, linen or silk, and in its placement and replication of the size and type of stitch originally used, for example, *cross stitch, stem stitch, satin stitch, French knots*.

The interviewed women's photograph albums have provided focus and motivation for my paintings because they guided the conversations I had with the women, as their memories surfaced and stories were voiced. While painting images of the dowry, I associated the significance of the embroidered designs of each participant's dowry to their cultural heritage and personal stories. As there is a similarity of dowry's history and customs between the participants' birth countries, I mostly combined the stitched images in my oil paintings rather than separate them according to their cultural source, to emphasise the overall waning of dowry as a cultural practice. As the works progressed I gradually

lessened the boundaries between the literal and imagined interpretations to more personally interpret my vision of nostalgic migratory dowry.

I used oil paint on a stretched linen base because dowry collections are predominantly stitched linen cloth. As a base for oil paint, linen can endure for hundreds of years and its weave is resistant to sagging when stretched. Linen has a maximum of one–centimetre movement compared to canvas weave at a maximum 10–centimetre movement. Scale was also an important decision. While the trial paintings were mostly kept within the 20–centimetre square range, the subsequent works are 'human scale' due to my choice of using actual size stitched images as an expressive element to emphasise the importance of dowry's cultural content. I painted to scale the stitched imagery to gradually draw the observer toward an intimate viewing space and scaled up the size of the linen base to affect both a close and distant engagement with my paintings.

Adding several thin layers of background paint to the linen, allowing each coat to dry, ensured it was sealed against deterioration, yet the cloth's texture remained evident. Painting is analogous to stitching – as the eye of a needle is loaded with thread, so is a brush loaded with paint in order to complete their respective work. The process is repetitive in its creativity until the image is complete. I used linen as a substrate to reinforce the materiality of dowry. I employed my *paint–for–stitch* process and pastiche to replicate embroidery techniques, used a figure-ground relationship to emphasise individual dowry motifs, the plane of

illusion to create depth of vision and used the over-painting process *pentimento*, to alter images.

The initial small painterly sketches were studies depicting the history of dowry, the women's stories and the labour involved in creating stitched dowry images. During this early creative phase I took a more literal approach to achieving the aims of the project, creating small scale rehearsal paintings, (Fig. 19a) and (Fig. 19b) that gradually led to larger scale embroidered cloths and stacks of folded dowry cloth. (Figs. 21), (Fig. 22) and (Fig. 25) to emphasise the importance of migratory dowry collections embedded with biography and nostalgia. After the completion of these paintings my strategies began to alter to better express my interpretation of the embroidered imagery attached to the women's personal stories and embedded culture, (Fig. 27) and (Fig. 29). Finally, in (Fig. 31) and (Fig. 32) I expose the imperfections, the unravelling and aging of the stitched dowry objects to more powerfully evoke nostalgic memories associated with dowry.

Dowry stories in paint

Using a sequential arrangement, I began a literal interpretation of dowry in the painting *Yearning* (Fig. 21) as a stack of dowry and *History* ((Fig. 22) illustrating samplers and *Nostalgia* (Fig. 25) where I presented folds of stacked dowry and used paint in particular ways to emphasise the concept of nostalgia embedded in dowry. To create a more personally imagined interpretation of dowry, in

Floating (Fig. 27) I illustrated the stitches leaving the cloth and unravelling into fragmented motifs and loose threads free–falling across three linen panels. Similarly, *Migratory memories* (Fig. 29) represented the imagined memories of the women migrants who searched for home as they drifted back and forth.

Returning the dowry motifs back to the cloth, the paintings *As Breath* ((Fig. 31) and *Longing* (Fig. 33) expressed the importance of the revered tablecloth used for special family occasions and the overlay of lace conveys the intricate networks of memory, nostalgia and longing. To complete the series, I created a literal interpretation of dowry in two small paintings, Upturn (Fig. 35) and *Remember* (Fig. 36) to express the need to care for and remember these personal items. The strategies used demonstrate that painting can powerfully reinterpret dowry and affirm dowry's historical significance.

The investigation summary

This project explores dowry objects belonging to post Second World War women migrants residing in Tasmania. It aims to evoke the significance of migratory dowry using paint as a means to depict the rich complex history embedded within. Conversations with migrant women in Tasmania have revealed how important the dowry has been in their daily lives. Yet these dowry collections, embedded with traditional imagery, cultural connections and

personal marks, are in danger of being seen as valueless tokens of the immigration experience.

While much has been written about the history of heirloom and the dowry attached to post Second World War female migration to several Australian states, there is scant literature relating to the heirlooms and dowries of migrants living in Tasmania. A number of artists have referenced embroidery practices of migrants to Australia in their work, but this project has specifically explored the significance of dowry as it relates to Tasmania. These facts combined with the participants' advancing ages and the probable scattering and eventual loss of some family dowry collections, underlines the importance of this timely research project.

Context

Dowry customs

My research into the dowry objects belonging to post Second World War women migrants residing in Tasmania revealed very little information about the history of dowry and its importance to Tasmania's migratory history. This project began with the recording of the migrant women's stories embedded in their dowry collections. These conversations I had with migrant women were accompanied by an abundance of historical and cultural images, pre-printed designs and personal expressions to stitch into their dowry cloth.[3] Driven to create a substantial dowry by the promise of a good marriage, from an early age these women were taught by family and convent women to stitch intricate patterns that indicated their place in the world, celebrated their prescribed matrilineal line and secured their future with cloth and thread.

Tence and Triarico (1999) explain the tradition of European dowry and its role in the lives of females from birth to death. While these authors have based their investigation on Italian traditions, Palaktsoglou's (2013) research reveals that while there was a similarity of dowry, history and customs throughout East, West and North Europe and the United States.

[3] Printed drawings of embroidery patterns were available for home embroiderers from 1524 and books of patterns were available in Europe by the mid–16th century. By 1804, printed patterns could be purchased on graph paper followed by patterns already printed on cloth by the late 1900s.

It was the European countries with strong cultural traditions with poor economies that revered the preservation of the dowry. Since ancient times, the birth of a male child was pivotal to the continuity of the family line. The birth of a female child meant immediate preparation for the provision of the dowry, especially the cloth that formed the bridal dowry because the linen and hemp had to be grown, harvested, retted, beaten, woven, bleached by the laying of cloth flat on clean grass and sewn. Young girls learned to stitch, usually from the age of six to 12 years, creating samplers to record various stitching methods, followed by lessons in needlework skills at the local convent to gain embroidery skills at a level appropriate for the making of dowry objects, and to ensure the girls remained 'pure' before marriage (Fig. 02).

(Fig. 02) © *Educandato di Sant'Anna, Ribera Sicily*, 1943. (Courtesy of Giovanna Miceli Jeffries). *Embroidered Stories*, *interpreting women's domestic needlework from the Italian Diaspora*, Giunta E and Sciorra J, 2014, p. 327.

Giovanna Miceli Jeffries' photograph (Fig. 02) portrays her mother her mother who is about 15 years of age. She is with her cohort of girls going to a day school of embroidery at the local convent. There they were taught, in addition to learning from their mothers, the art of stitching and embroidery to complete a bridal dowry of traditional sets of various linens, tablecloths, bed covers and intimate garments.

Never without needle and thread, the migrant women, as young girls, affianced or newly married would stitch cloth either singularly, with family or in groups, each embroidered image an easily identifiable mark linked to family and place. When complete, hands would gently fold the embroidered cloths and place them in storage, knowing that tradition demands dowry.

The bridal dowry was most often a burden on the family finances, yet dowry was considered so vital to good marriage prospects that private trusts and charities were established to provide dowries for destitute or fatherless girls. A public appraisal of the dowry often took place involving parents, relatives and guests to estimate and approve the worth of the dowry before the wedding ceremony could proceed. The bride was responsible for ensuring the dowry remained within the matrilineal line and continued to be her property until death. In times of extreme financial struggle women would reluctantly pawn or sell pieces of their dowry. Deep shame was attached to such acts. Marika tells of her mother's decision to sell her linen, piece by piece, to feed herself and three children who

fled their home and lived for many years in hill caves on the island of Crete, while her father was away fighting on foreign soil as the Second World War raged across Greece.

Dowry as migratory objects

In Australia during the post Second World War period of the 1950s and 1960s, the majority of migrants were young, and due to language and cultural barriers, single men had scant opportunity to wed in Australia. They preferred to marry women from their own country, town or village so they could share the same background. For young women, finding a suitable husband was difficult because many of the young men had migrated to other countries and the cost for male migrants to return to their region for a bride was prohibitive. These men were working, paying off their assisted passage costs to the Australian Government and saving to place a deposit on a house to share with a future bride. Further, social customs discouraged young single women to travel to Australia to marry, as defending their virtue was paramount. Those women who travelled as unmarried were most often married immediately on arrival in Australia at the nearest church to the wharf, are described in migratory terms by Skrbis (2017, p. 170) as 'wharf-side brides'. The women who married before migrating, without the bridegroom present at the ceremony, were known as proxy brides.

Proxy marriage occurred when either the bride or groom at the marriage

ceremony was represented by a substitute known as a proxy. The bride was married, often in full wedding regalia, within a formal church ceremony to a nominated substitute groom (usually a father, brother or male cousin) with family and relatives as witnesses and family members of the groom (who was living in Australia). Meanwhile, the prospective groom married a substitute bride by proxy while in Australia. A third marriage ceremony took place when both the bride and groom were finally united in Australia.

(Fig. 03) © *Photographs from the migrant women's photograph albums*, c. 1950s, Elizabeth Gray.

While my project has mainly focussed on dowries and heirlooms, the role proxy brides play in Australia's 20th century migratory history has also been relevant. It was the fiancée, waiting many years in Europe for the Australian immigration documents, which had the time and the cultural prerequisite to create a complete dowry. In anticipation of their future married and domestic life, the young women amassed considerable dowries for the marital home – a measure

of a bride's wealth and cultural connections. Wardrop (1996) presents extensive research into the migration of proxy brides, detailing the many international administrative procedures managed by the Capuchin monks in Melbourne. She explains the extraordinary amount of time taken and the determination needed to complete the copious paperwork that required translation into several languages.

These documents were sent back and forth between Australia and Europe for many months and often, years. Similar to the Italian dowry traditions, in both rural and urban Greek society, young girls spent many years developing the skills of crochet, embroidery, weaving and mending to eventually prepare a marriage dowry. Dowries included linen for the future home, as well as clothing for themselves and often the bridal outfit. Palaktsoglou (2013) investigates the cultural and social changes in dowry practices of post-war migrants and describes the contents of a typical European dowry.

> Either 6, 12 or 24 bed sheets and the equivalent pairs of pillowcases, 6 or 12 towels, a few tablecloths and napkins, tea-towels, blankets for summer and winter and 1 or 2 quilts. Embroidered items for the household were crafted in rich and exquisite patterns, either by the girls or by professional embroiderers. The chest was an essential part of the household furniture and was used to store white linen, blankets, quilts and family heirlooms (p. 224).

My initial introduction to a migrant woman's dowry collection exposed folded cloths that teemed with life. Opening the blue curved tin lid of her wooden dowry box Ephrasini cried '…the arrival of my dowry box from Lesbos was such a heavenly moment. I had been waiting a long time for it to come'. As she lifted a delicate dowry item into the light, I could see undulating and intertwining stitched stems floating upon a sheer surface carrying leaves and cornflower blue petals centred with yellow stamens, a butterfly and a bee, the crossover layers of shadow flowers and stems and leaves that rippled within the folds, as breath. Further research into migrant women's dowry collections exposed Leva's Latvian and Helinä's Finnish stitched geometric patterns in thread on white linen. Marika's Cretan and Eulalia's Italian cloths with vibrantly coloured embroidered flowers floating free or clustered into corners. Sonia's English heirloom cloth that conjures up memories of traditional afternoon teas – white and pink flowers, falling petals, irises, violets, daisies and other domestic garden flowers embroidered on lace–edged linen. Elvira's handmade crocheted matrimonial bed–cover passed down from her Italian great, great grandmother and Chantale's precious Belgian lace collection.

When handling and explaining their dowry items during our conversations, the women expressed a play of emotions evidencing nostalgic memories. All the heirloom and dowry collections belonging to the migrant women participants offered me entrée into cultural imagery pertaining to the woman's country of origin and provided inspiration to evoke the significance of these beautifully

crafted objects.

During the 20th century dowry was still a legal requirement and a given in European countries when marriage was announced. The fiancée's dowry objects were traditionally put on public display so an estimate could be made of the future bride's wealth. But the cherished and once highly valued dowries eventually became impractical, devalued, dispersed and sometimes discarded by the makers and their descendants. Dowry traditions progressively declined since the abolition of the dowry and its removal from the Constitution. This was enacted in 1968 in Italy and 1983 in Greece. Dowry was not legally binding in other East, West and North European countries.

Heirloom and dowry objects have remained vital in the lives of the migrant participants. They honoured and accepted the tradition that a considerable dowry led to a beneficial marriage, and that tradition remained somewhat unchanged, although the modern dowry consists of both heirloom and purchased ready-made objects.

Dowry collections are usually kept in hall cupboards, wardrobes and dowry trunks. Bachelard (1994) views these storage places as intimate spaces where a world of order exists. These spaces '…are not open to just anybody' (p. 78). The author writes of his memories of wardrobes and armoires filled with piles of dowry '…to open it, is to experience an event of whiteness.' (p. 79) and described

how he desired to free them and bring them into the light. The author quoted O. V. de L'Milosz when writing about the intimacy connected to wardrobes.

> Memories come crowding in when we look back upon the shelf on which the lace-trimmed batiste and muslin pieces lay on top of the heavier materials: 'A wardrobe,' writes Milosz 'is filled with the mute tumult of memories (p. 79).

Mindful of the importance of the cultural connections and generational biographies embedded within their dowries, Tasmanian migrants have carefully stored dowry collections for future generations.

The biography of dowry

Vanni, (2013) investigates the biography of dowries and portrays them as being central to resettlement in Australia because '…they enact geographies of 'home' and the 'unhomely' (p. 151). Transnational homemaking practices, both using and displaying the linen brought from home, may well transport migrant women to another time and place and represent '...a haptic link to the memories of an earlier family life ... and act as a metaphor for the patterning and planning of their lives' (p. 131). Vanni's proposition aligns with those of Giunta and Sciorra (2014) who describe migrants embroidered dowry objects as being 'cultural touchstones' that are embedded with personal stories of the migratory experience.

> Needlework can thus function, as an artefact of the imagination, a repository of dreams, hopes, disappointments, desires. It is the material for memory work (p. 04).

Stitching a biographical image on cloth gives the embroiderer considerable power as she creates a personal mark on her dowry item that gives presence and meaning to an otherwise mundane domestic object. These stitched monograms on traditional *biancheria* (white linen dowry embroidered with white thread) were thought to bestow value and virtue and were a physical reminder of the maker that linked generations to dowry heirlooms. Two examples are expressed – Eleni's embroidered initials on her dowry pillow sham, E for *Eleni* and K for her future surname in *Migrant woman's dowry object*, (Fig. 04), and my painting, *Remember* (Fig. 35), embroidered with the word *Domenica* (meaning *Sunday*).

(Fig. 04) © A *migrant woman's dowry object*, c.1940, image, Elizabeth Gray.

Applying biography to an object creates a conundrum because biographical objects function mainly on a personal level; the makers of dowry objects loaded them with cultural connections, personal symbols, stories and significance. They were handmade, admired, valued, used, carefully laundered, folded into travel baggage, stored, forgotten and were then rediscovered. Allen (2016) explains the application of biography to an object.

> The core of the meaning of an object is inseparable from the form and iconography invested in it at its making, but the more subtle aspects are those less intentional, less conscious variations of style and the

> idiosyncrasies of the hand of the maker, and then subsequently the adventitious marks that is has suffered in the course of its afterlife...we are thus invited to contemplate the form produced by human hand, and then as with ruins, the effects of entropy and, above all, the way the object is reclaimed by the living forces of nature (pp. 10-11).

Close inspection of a dowry object reveals slight imperfections in the stitching and the wear and stains that reflect its biography. The biography of an object can also be translated as a personal experience of migration through dowry and the practices connected with these objects.

Dowry as objects of nostalgia and loss

Stewart (1993) has declared there is a gap between the memory of objects and their ascribed biographies because the past is continually constructed and reconstructed through lived experience. She asserts, 'It is the gap between resemblance and identity that nostalgic desire arises …nostalgia cannot be sustained without loss' (p. 145). Vanni (2013) expands on Stewart's statement by attaching nostalgia and loss to migration that create a longing for emotive objects and homeland. Vanni refers to the anthropologist, the philosopher and historian Ernesto de Martino (1908-1965) who wrote about *spaesamento* in terms of loss of the familiar and the domestic as 'unhomeliness' and *le apocalissi culturali*, cultural apocalypses as the end of the current world, historically, culturally and politically with the possibility of resolution of crisis and renewal.

Migration could be an event that leads to the loss of one's historical belonging, people and objects, everyday gestures, habitual words and idioms that made it possible for 'things' to function in the world. The author iterated that once the relationship between objects, their usage and meaning was broken, such familiar objects lost their cultural blueprint and were subject to neglect.

Vanni's interpretation of de Martino's words, from his Italian language to English, has been fundamental to this project. She,has established powerful connections between dowry, biographies, latent memories, nostalgia and language. Through usage, dowry objects could reproduce familiar domestic landscapes, thus enabling habits and memories to live within the present. According to Vanni, it was through the retrieval and use of these objects that the '…unhomely …which literally means without a village, without a country' (p. 151), faded into a new sense of home for them.

Far from home, traditional objects for migrants become even more important in an alien land, yet some migrants eventually abandoned elements of their culture as too ancient and oppressive. Tence and Triarico (1999) propose that the seeking of freedom from family dependence, abandoning the traditional roles in the home and moving into paid work, usually as seamstresses and needle workers, altered the traditional value of dowry. By the 1990s, the migrants' second-generation of women did not collect linen ware for the purpose of marriage, but for practical use in the home. For some migrant women the

culturally inscribed patterns were abandoned for embroidered motifs with an Australian content. These individual aesthetic choices complemented their home in a new country, while maintaining the resilient threads of sentiment and cultural values. But the older generation either still stitched occasionally or remembered their stitched patterns when using dowry objects, such as tablecloths and napkins, for special family celebrations.

Gibson (2008) has reflected on objects that were stored in rooms or given to family members, friends, charity shops or ended up on eBa*y*. She suggests that from childhood to old age, people emotionally supported themselves with material possessions to create a personal space and claim identity; because objects hold biography and carry a narrative of the self, particularly so when people experienced disconnection and loss. Gibson explains the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott's concept of cathexis, '...a psychic charge or emotional stimulus attached to love objects and figures of identification' (p. 32). Gibson suggests cathexis offers a context for considering the nostalgic value of objects when the significance of personal possessions belonging to elderly family members is truly noticed. Particularly the missing pieces left behind or lost post–migration.

Loss or absence of an object was a recurring reflection during my conversations with the participants. They have described how certain dowry objects, not kept within families, could be found in second-hand shops, where nothing is known about what they may have meant to someone, as their history is difficult to

decipher. Hecht (2001) has written about personal possessions kept in the home and maintains that a collection of objects can create profound experiences.

> For these are more than mere 'things'; they are a collection of appropriated materials, invested with meaning and memory, a material testament of who we are, where we have been, and perhaps even where we are heading…They bind our past with our present…thereby framing and reflecting our sense of self (p. 123).

All these authors' ideas have been significant to my project in various ways. They have facilitated my conversion of their vital words into an informed critical suite of paintings depicting historical, cultural and nostalgic dowry objects saturated with women's stories and the symbolic power of their needlework. While the authors linked my project to a cumulative interpretation of dowry, the writer who initially guided my project was Rozsika Parker who re-presented embroidery as stitched autobiographical story telling. Naming it 'art', she moved female domestic stitching into academic enquiry.

Dowry as feminine practice

Roszika Parker challenged attitudes toward embroidery being a female domestic craft and re-presented it as powerful individual acts of subversion through stitched autobiographical story telling. Parker (1984) wrote a substantial feminist critique that exposes domestic embroidery to academic enquiry and

uncovers previously marginalised embroidery to scholarly scrutiny. Parker argues that embroidery is a cultural practice that historically explored femininity as a lived experience and asserts that the meanings attached to needlework gradually grew from submission to self-containment. The author also states '...embroidery was no more innately feminine than are women; it had simply become part of the construction of femininity' (p. 103), and sees embroidery as a cultural practice that explores the feminine as a lived experience She states, 'It is 'art' because it involves iconography, style and a social function' (p. 6).

> When women paint, their work is categorised as homogeneously feminine – it is acknowledged to be art. When women embroider, it is seen not as art, but entirely as the expression of femininity (p. 05).

Parker's revelations about the historical and cultural practices of embroidery guided my project towards a young girl's early stitching skills that historically began with samplers. For example, *Spot Motif Sampler* (detail), (Fig. 05). Some practice samplers revealed the development of stitching patterns as skills increased, with partial completion of some images and evidence of stains, errors, unpicking and small rips in the cloth. Sebba (1979*)* describes samplers as being a record of events such as births, deaths, marriages, mothering and moving to new homes or lands that could offer an intimate knowledge of the needleworker. Humphrey (1997) explains the patterns on the (Fig. 05) *Spot Motif Sampler*. '…

some forty detached motifs in metal thread stitching techniques…' and gives a description of the stitchery styles used. The author suggests that the same motifs could be found on samplers made much earlier '…thus adding weight to the theory that patterns are repeatedly worked by succeeding generation of girls' (p. 24).

> Linen. Embroidered with polychrome silks in tent, cross, long-armed cross, back, chain, eyelet, rococo, and faggot stitch with pulled work. Silver and silver-gilt thread work in braid and interlacing stitches, laid and couched work with one spangle (p. 24).

Maria–Alina Asavei's, (2015) paper references the Balkans and Central Europe samplers and examines the nostalgic qualities of the dowry sampler linked to memory.

> Although they are no longer produced in the region in their initial form and setting, their memory and the reflective nostalgia associated with their presence in Central-South-Eastern European kitchens and living rooms is materialised in new and hybrid cultural forms. They are recycled as nostalgic items in contemporary art and urban popular culture because those who still remember them associate their presence with the lives they have lived (p. 17).

While samplers no longer form part of a young girl's education, they are still made, through choice rather than cultural requirements. This thorough practice, employed for centuries to facilitate the creation of common household linens, has almost vanished in only a couple of generations.

The significance of samplers to my submitted suite of paintings relates to the concept of women's work. Stitching will always remain somewhat subversive while it continues to hold a low–level position in the fine art canon.

I have expressed the importance of sampler embroidery through oil paint on cloth to draw attention to this declining art, *History*, (Fig. 22). While samplers are traditionally displayed as a single item, I chose a diptych arrangement to emphasise the two sectors in the migrant women's lives – before and after migration.

(Fig. 05) © Humphrey, C 1998, *Spot Motif Sampler* (detail), c. 1640, coloured silks on linen, 27 x 4.25cm, (p. 24).

Commonly considered a woman's hobby today, the art of historical, cultural and contemporary needlework is still practised for professional reasons through embroiderers associations, much like the Craft Guilds of Medieval Europe. The Embroiderers Guild Victoria maintains traditions and skills and constantly promotes embroidery and lace making through exhibitions such as *The presence of things: sense, veneer and guise* curated by Stephen Gallagher (2006). The responses of the selected artists to a single chosen artefact from the Guild's collection were translated from the medium of embroidery and lace into art works using paper, ceramic, textile, metal and glass. These contemporary artists are exploring various mediums in their needlework practice that exists beyond traditional needlecraft.

As lace making was a specialised form of needlework, the women's dowry collections of lace were either family heirlooms or purchased from needleworkers who specifically made lace for dowries and for the church. Lace was often used as an *insertion* – a length of lace with two straight edges stitched directly onto a 'mounting cloth'. When the lace making was complete the mounting was cut away, leaving a strip of delicate, intricate see-through lace.

Chantale's collection of lace belonged to her Belgian grandmother who collected and made some lace herself. Chantale says, 'I especially value the lace items embroidered with monograms of family members as I feel through them there is a direct connection to me' (Fig. 06),

These lace strips were inserted in dowry's household linen, such as tablecloths, curtains, tray cloths and table runners, pillow shams and bed sheets. Lace has both symbolic and economic implications for the dowry. Lace was a measure of the honour and status of the bride; the more lace, the higher the honour. Lace as a fabric can take the viewer to an intimate layer of meaning via glimpses through the netted lace and its transparent construction. I have voiced the importance of lace in dowry collections through my painting, *Longing* (2017) (Fig. 36), and have expressed the unravelling of memory through the loose and disconnecting threads of the lace.

(Fig. 06) © *Lace from Chantale's heirloom collection, c. 20th century*, image, Elizabeth Gray.

Dowry's foral and geometric imagery

The women I interviewed, who originally lived in the Mediterranean region and centrally based in Europe, mainly have dowry collections embroidered with cultural designs in both brightly coloured and white-on-white botanical imagery. Women from northern European countries, whose lives were internal for many months of the year due to the long winters, mainly stitched and wove geometric

patterns that required a complex counted thread technique to create repeating motifs with primary colours in mainly cross stitch designs. An example of a complex geometrical ornamentation is expressed in a migrant woman's woven image based on a traditional Finnish design, (Fig. 07), and Aleks Danko's culturally specific geometrical designs in multiple gouaches on paper that are translations of a complex Ukrainian design on an embroidered cushion made by his mother (Fig. 15).

(Fig. 07) © *Helinä's woven dowry object symbolising an enclosed secret garden*, linen and thread, c. 1970, image, Elizabeth Gray.

References to such geometric designs on the dowry objects, in full and partial forms, are strewn amongst the botanical imagery in several of my paintings. The embroidered botanical imagery stitched onto the migrants' dowry teems with beauty and colour that evokes scented gardens, intricate relationships, love, chastity, marriage and identity.

In Giunta and Sciorra (2014) (pp. 213-236) Joseph J. Inguanti describes how embroidery pattern books became a popular commercial product alongside the Florilegium and the *giardino segreto* (the enclosed secret garden) imagery. [4] In Italy, during the late 16th to the 17th century, botanical iconography moved from the genre of naturalistic illustrations to artworks of extraordinary colours and textures.

An artist whose work transcended botanical accuracy is Jacopo Ligozzi (1547-1626), a Veronese illustrator born into a family of embroiderers. Ligozzi worked for the Habsburg court in Vienna, became a painter to the Medici court and later was the head of the Accademia del Disegno. While Ligozzi painted portraits and miniature, he is best known as an illustrator of botanical themes painted in rich hues with a naturalistic vision, (Fig. 08). Ligozzi's *naturalia* designs were uniquely suited for embroidered ceremonial fabrics, religious garments, furniture coverings and domestic linen and painted ideas for stone tabletops.

[4] The term *florilegia* is applied to a treatise on flowers or medieval books that are dedicated to ornamental rather than the medicinal or utilitarian plants. The emergence of botanical illustration as a genre of art dates back to the 15th century and as printing techniques advanced, and new plants came to Europe from Ottoman Turkey in the 16th century, wealthy individuals and botanic gardens commissioned artists to record the beauty of these exotics in *Florilegium*.

(Fig. 08) © Jacopo Ligozzi, ca.1610, *Model for a pietre dure tabletop*, oil paint on paper, 78 x 88cm, Museo delle Opificio della Pietre Dura, Florence, Italy.

In the Lucia Tomasi and Gretchen Hirschauer (2002) National Gallery of Washington exhibition catalogue *The Flowering of Florence: Botanical Art for the Medici*, the authors assert that the influence of Ligozzi's paintings of botanical images on embroidery continued for several centuries after his death. In the twenty-first century, I too was influenced by Ligozzi's unrestrained floating floral arrangement (Fig. 08) which evoked for me concepts of embroidered images floating, dipping and soaring in all directions through the air, signifying

the the impermanence of all things as the migrating women journeyed across land, sea and sky. This inkling combined with Hodges' installation (Fig. 13) eventually led to the creation of *Floating* (Fig. 28).

Dowry's historical botanical imagery

Ligozzi's influential flair for botanical imagery is evident in 17th century Dutch still life flower paintings where emphasis is placed on aesthetic appearance through highly decorative images. These works were painted in great detail and bright colours enhanced by realistic lighting effects. The arrangements of flowers and insects depicted were either in vases or as loose bouquets, and from various countries and continents. They were painted in bud, full bloom or decay – all in one moment of time.

Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750), revered among 17th and 18th century *pronkstillevens* painters of her time, exquisitely rendered, realistic and vibrantly coloured flower compositions that appear loose and flourishing (Fig. 09). Free from the constrictions of historical flower arranging, the buds or fully formed flowers attached to curving stems, reach high into the picture plane or droop down to the bottom edge, giving a sense of both spontaneity and energy yet impermanence due to the unwieldy floral arrangement that might suddenly topple and disperse. Ruysch's influence is evident in my painting *Migrating Memories* (Fig. 29) where I used paint to evoke the restless bud, flourishing

beauty and the wilt of florae imagery to convey a sense of nostalgia for 'home' as the migrant women age in a land not of their birth.

(Fig.09) © Rachel Ruysch (Dutch, 1664–1750), *Flower Still Life*, about 1726, oil on canvas 29 ¾ x 23 7/8 in. (75.6 x 60.6 cm), Toledo Museum of Art (Toledo, Ohio), Purchased with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, 1956–57. Photo Credit: Richard P. Goodbody Inc.

Ruysch's use of form, colour and texture combined with meticulous attention to detail is innovative and dynamic. Yet her paintings also suggested decay, death and the passage of time that are the very essence of our natural environment and of us. Many centuries later, examples of Ruysch's floral imagery can be found on some of the women's 20th century embroidered dowry objects. For example, in the detail of Marika's c.1950 embroidered dowry cloth (Fig. 10). I have translated this image in many of my paintings, (Fig. 21 to Fig 31).

(Fig. 10) © *Detail of Marika's c.1950 embroidered dowry cloth*, image, Elizabeth Gray.

The still life genre

Because I have used paint to create illusion and promote the innate physical presence embedded in dowry, the still life genre was an appropriate process to create paintings of the migrant women's dowry. This genre speaks of stillness, the temporality of death/life experiences, the inevitable onset of decay and the impermanence of our worldly possessions and our lives. Still life is an ideal style of painting for this project because of its particular characteristics.

The still life genre requires artists to have imitative skills to re-present an object. Owens (1994) has discussed how illusion and representation can be demonstrated in two symbolic modes – substitution or imitation – leading to what a painterly representation might reveal and conceal. As I planned to test the boundaries between what was real in still life paintings and what was illusory, Owens' words were central to my studio work.

> The first, or symbolic mode is the mode of substitution; the image is conceived as a replacement, a stand-in, and therefore as compensating for an *absence*. The second, or theatrical mode is the mode of repetition; the image is defined as the replica of a visual experience, and the artist works to promote the illusion of the tangible, physical *presence* of the objects he [she] represents (p. 97).

While various authors have explained the role still life has played in the arts, it was Doty (2001), who gave me an acute insight into the contemplative and

hushed nature of this genre. The author suggests '…there is no end to our looking…' (p. 55), and claims these paintings can turn the everyday familiar into an '…almost hallucinatory clarity, nothing glanced over or elided, nothing subordinate to the impression of the whole' (p. 56).

> Sometimes I think these paintings seem full of secrets, full of unvoiced presences. And surely one of their secrets – somewhere close to essence – lies in a sense of space that is unique to them. These things exist up close. This is the space of the body, the space of our arms' reach. There is nothing before us here we could not touch, were these things not made of paint. The essential quality of them is their nearness (p. 55).

Andrew David King (2002) believed there was an ancient relationship between poetry and painting that offered prolonged attention and faith that the viewed objects carried meaning and had '…a sense of being held within an intimacy with the things of the world' (p. 02).

> What makes a poem a poem finally is that it is unparaphrasable as is a painting' and further states. To think through things: that is the still life painter's work – and the poet's ,(p. 02).

Poetry, as painting, is a powerful form of telling that reveals the inner workings of the maker. The language patterns in Phyllis Capello's lyrical prose *Embroidery*

(p. 48) reminds me of the patterns of rhythm I feel when painting embroidery – stitch by stitch.

Embroidery

This line is a red silk thread

and it is stitching a rose on this page

which is white linen.

This line is cornflower-blue and it is making

French knots in the flower patch.

This yellow for a daisy, a satin stitch.

Wait: I'm not done.

Green for the stem stitches,

(Oriental in their graceful sway.)

My pen is the scissor that snips the threads,

my hand the box where I keep them;

my rhyme is the pattern I follow and work.

the ink is the needle that pierces the page –

Feel the fabric of my poem,

here and there a word sticks out

like a French knot in the middle of the stamen.

(Giunta and Sciorra, (2014), (p. 247).

Doty (2001) suggests the mystery of still life is missing if poetry is absent, as still life paintings require '…the long act of seeing' (p.70), and Woodley (2014) remarks on a noticeable change towards the interpretation of the still life genre in contemporary practice.

> The exhibiting contemporary artists had revisited and expanded the historical genre of still life through the use of recent material and digital innovations, ways of seeing and organizing images. When taken together, it was clear that the artists' methods and modes of working had enabled them to retrieve, resurrect, reconfigure, re-imagine, remix, re-interpret and reinvent still life of the past in a remarkable range of new images (p. 05).

All these authors' words reinforce the unbroken acceptance of the still life genre and the potential for endless interconnection between contemporary and historical still life works. This is due to still life's illusory qualities, its future possibilities, its object depiction in various forms, its ability to carry stories across time and its capacity to encourage reflection on its enrichment of form. All these aspects of the still life genre are incorporated in my submitted paintings in various guises. This genre has been a key component of my exploration of dowry through painting. Once the stitched motifs are placed in specific or unplanned arrangements, they take on new meaning as their existence is recorded in paint. Nostalgia and memory are irrevocably entwined

with the participants' cloth heirloom and dowry objects. My aim was to convey these concepts through painting. Gibbons (2007) suggests it is an artist's willingness to explore difficult or sensitive subject matter and new forms that gives art the cutting edge.

> No matter how complex or obtuse the memory-work or the address to memory in contemporary art, it is the skill and creativity sensibility with which the artist returns to the past, gathers it in, binds it and puts its parts together that bring moment and give renewed meaning to the original experience or event. The artist's ability to set the past within a social or collective framework is also vital to the success of memory (p. 147).

Painterly images of cloth upon cloth

The softness, strength and fragility of cloth can capture the vulnerability of the human body that mediate between past and present and bind generations through dowry objects. Cloth has traditionally been linked to life itself. Watt's paintings illustrate Gibbons' above statement about an artist's willingness to explore the past and give new meaning to traditional forms. Devoid of any embellishment, Watt's still life paintings are studies in white paint on white cloth (Fig. 10). Her key influence was the historical paintings of Francisco de Zurbarán's (1598-1664) where draped cloth appears to be in its raw state and dominates the figure beneath. Another stimulus for Watt was Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780-1867) who painted cloth in various textures and

colours draped over and around the human figure. Watt's treatment of a cloth base over-painted in oil to capture a sense of cloth with texture and folds and light and shade, influenced how I formed the cloth bases for my submitted paintings by allowing the textured weave of the linen to remain simply as cloth.

To create a phenomenal encounter, Watt builds into her paintings a sense of an invisible physical presence and creates folds of white that become fabric when they emotionally touch the viewer. Her painterly surfaces celebrate the bodily act of brushing paint onto a textured cloth base that builds a physical connection between the cloth, the painter and the participating viewer and goes beyond the merely tactile.

(Fig. 11) © Alison Watt, 2011 *Shoal*, oil on canvas, 61.9 x 121.9cm, private collection, photograph: John McKenzie, image courtesy the Artist and Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh.

The size of Watt's 'white' paintings gain extra grandeur as the unframed paintings flow out onto the white walls. Swan (2008) has written of her

experiences when looking at the artist's painted draperies.

> It is like burying one's hands in their luxurious folds and, from that formless raw material, fashioning – godlike – the figure of a woman. And yet, strangely, this female figure is not so much fashioned *with* the hands, as it is *within* the hands – the artist's, the viewer's. ...Too painterly to effect this sensation through a *trompe l'oeil* illusion, Watt's fabric paintings function by transferring to the viewer's body the artist's own phenomenal encounter with moulded masses of cloth (p. 131).

Swan argues that Watt's paintings are not optical illusions (as they can appear in reproductions) rather, '…each painting manifested an extraordinary image of the fabric from which it was modelled' (p. 23). Watt's luminous white drapery with both gentle and heavy folds painted simply as cloth–on–cloth, reveals how she used a linen base to create her cloth images. Influenced by Watt's paintings, I painted cloth-like imagery over a linen base in various semblances for all my submitted paintings. Distinct from Watt whose painted cloth images remained pristine and unadorned, I overlaid my painterly bases with a myriad stitched and embroidered cultural motifs in a variation of styles and colours to accentuate the migrant women's significant dowry collections.

Artists engaged with objects

Priola's images of objects are reminiscent of the dowry collections belonging to the migrant women involved in this project, in that they evoke a mix of the past,

love and pathos, loss, longing, secret things, memory, nostalgia and biography I associate with migratory dowry. While Priola uses black and white photography to produce emotive stilled images within this genre's restrictive traditions, I have used the versatility of the painting process to vary the spatial surface of my paintings; to highlight the texture of cloth; to create a painterly illusion of stitches unravelling, floating, falling and fragmenting; to enhance with glaze the vibrant colours of the stitched embroidery motifs and expose stitchery flaws.

It is Priola's profound understanding of the beauty of enduring marks of time found on cherished objects that inspired me to include his 'lived experiences' in my still life paintings, particularly my interpretation of samplers, *History* (Fig. 22) where I have embedded stains in ragged cloth, the missed and unpicked stitches, pattern errors and unravelling threads to convey the years the cloths were handled, stitched and altered during the making of these samplers.

Priola focuses on evoking the secret life of objects. His monochrome photographs are of lone and small domestic groupings of objects that have deteriorated over time. There is an historical resonance of another place in another time in Priola's carefully chosen objects. His image *Lace*, (1995) (Fig. 12) reveals surface stains and tattered embroidered fringing that imply lived experiences. While these stains of time and use are evident in all my paintings in various guises, either obvious or barely discernable, I discretely inserted them

in my interpretation of dowry lace in *Longing* (Fig. 34) as lace is handled with much care and reverence.

In Solnit's (1998) essay about Priola's still life images, she suggests there is an emotive timelessness attached to his objects that imply they are more than material things because the very basis of still life is that '…objects can convey ideas, emotions, or histories and that the inanimate world is potentially articulate' (p. 123). The author states that objects have their own durations and the ability to recall memories and bring one back to the moment.

> Objects seem like witnesses, silent, unjudging, obdurate witnesses to the lives that go on in front of them. Perhaps we imbue objects with associational meaning to bring their otherness back within the fold of the familiar, to make their muteness speak, to associate them with the absences we know rather than those more profound absences we do not (p. 118).

(Fig. 12) © J. John Priola, 1995, *Lace,* from the series *Saved,* gelatin-silver print, 47.9 x 37.7cm, courtesy of the artist and the Anglim Gilbert Gallery, San Francisco, CA.

The author asserts that Priola's studio photographs fit with the still life genre that traditionally belongs to painting and are '…in a sense *still* life' (p. 119). But unlike still life painting, Priola's images are most often lone objects rather than traditional domestic assemblages. Similar to the dowry collections of the women migrants, his photographs create '…fragments of memory that appear

vividly out of darkness, in isolation' (p. 121). Solnit equated photography with still life painters because they '…dealt with a kind of intimate clarity of vision' (p.119). Solnit further stated that '…in a sense, all works of art are still lifes …and all photographs are about the past; this is inherent to the medium' (p. 123).

In contrast to Priola's monochrome images of timeworn emotive objects, Hodges created moments of everyday life inspired by nature's florae, including petals, leaves and insects scattered across a gallery wall. In his installation, *Changing things* (Fig. 13), he pinned brightly coloured commercial silk flowers, petals, buds and insects across a wide space of wall. Hodges' installation suggests dispersion and the random movement associated with migration. Viso (2013) describes Hodges' art practice as having at its core, humanity.

> It is work about a body moving through life, through experiences, marking life's moments with simple acts of devotion … that help us see familiar things in the world differently. Although Hodges would not describe himself as a poet or a philosopher, aspects of both are manifest in his art (p. 05).

Searching for ways to evoke the significance of the women's migratory journey to Tasmania, Hodges' installation spoke to me of the dispersion and randomness of migration supported by Viso's (2013) words that connect Hodges' installation to the act of marking significant moments in one's life. The artist's poetic

musings about the fragile nature of flowers and human existence related to the embroidered motifs on the dowry objects of the migrant women.

(Fig. 13) © Jim Hodges, 1997, *Changing things*, silk, plastic, wire and pins (342 parts), 2010 installation view on Camden Gallery wall, London.

Hodges installs his work in a different layout each time he publicly displays *Changing things*, randomly positioning the motifs to represent another life-altering journey. His random placement of motifs and the continuing recreation of the installation equates with migration because the act of leaving home and family for the unknown requires the constant repositioning of one's life and emotions. To evoke a nostalgic impression of leaving and to intensify the risk

taken by the women as they migrated to an unknown southern land, I reinterpreted Ligozzi's (Fig. 08) unrestrained florae images and Hodges' (Fig. 13) installation of scattered silk flowers to create my painting, *Floating* (Fig. 27).

Artists who focussed on the migrant experience

Few artists have focused specifically on Australian migrants' dowry, and no artist has, despite intensive research, created a painterly suite of embroidered migratory dowry. However, some artists have created works that capture the significance of particular objects linked to post Second World War migrants in Australia. In particular, artists Danko, Griffin and Markes-Young, who have positively affected my approach to painting dowry's intricately stitched patterns and florae and make visible the individual methods they use to recreate culturally specific designs in their work that require prolonged repetitious processes, similar to my *paint-for-stitch* process. Danko and Griffin recreate objects that belonged to their respective migrant mothers and Markes-Young is continuously stitching threaded renditions of her European grandmother's unfinished linen.

While each artist works in a personal way there are similarities in these artists' processes. Griffin nostalgically reconstructs her mother's dowry object using small stones placed on cloth (Fig.16) and Markes-Young's labour intensive stitching connects her childhood migration encounters to traditional European

textiles that relate back to her Polish grandmother (Fig. 17). Danko recreates multiple geometric images in gouache on paper (Fig. 15), referencing a stitched wool cushion cover his mother and her friends embroidered in a South Australian migrant hostel in 1949 (Fig. 14a).

(Fig. 14a) © Aleks Danko. *My mother and friends at the Woodside Army Camp and Migrant Hostel South Australia in 1949. (Mother is first on the left) from the Series 'Some Cultural Meditations 1949-2015', 2006.* Type C photograph, 127 x 200cm, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Gift of Aleks Danko, 2011. No. 92, p. 124.

Rostek (2015) explains the Ukrainian design on Danko's cushion (Figs. 14a, 14b) as being a section of a larger embroidered image from the Carpathian ridge with links to Tartar designs. Used mainly on clothes, ceremonial cloths and the

adornment of special objects, this symbolic pattern defined Danko's family origins. Rostek asserts that, as with most complex geometrical ornamentation, there are both real and metaphysical patterns that would eventually be altered, lost and superseded over time yet the basic design remains as an ideogram. Danko's cushion displays a central square as the ultimate spiritual world with four green cross-sections (traditionally these cross-sections represented 'rivers' embroidered in blue) enclosed by an inhabited world kept safe with several borders, the black border being the outer edge of the domain. Rostek decoded for Danko the ideogram design:

> The smaller squares leading from the four side squares to the central symbol of the 'centre' have a certain complex symbolism of their own. …These squares are linked to the mystery of Being. …It can also embody a direct but complex link between human existence and the ultimate mystery of Being (p. 129).

Although Danko's conceptual approach to art and life is infused with satirical humour and a subtle critique of Australia's contemporary social values, as artists we have similarly created works from a domestic perspective, in that we use personal stories, memories, nostalgia and cultural motifs to express migratory experiences. The intensity required to create his works (Fig. 15) based on his mother's stitched cushion cover, encouraged me to persist with my *paint-for-stitch* method of painting dowry's embroidered motifs.

(Fig. 14b) © Aleks Danko, Ukrainian, *'Centre of the World*,' cross stitch cushion cover 1949 from the series *Some cultural meditations 1949-201*5, No. 84, makers: Maria Danko and friends, wool, cotton, 14 x 50 x 42cm.

Danko translated the complex design of his mother's cushion 'Centre of the world', into multiple gouaches on paper, each taking a month to complete (Fig. 15). Drawing on his migration history, the artist put the post Second World War history of Australian migration under close scrutiny with his astute ways of attracting the critical gaze of the art world, through the use of the repetitious

domain of objects, design and language. He treated both his native tongue and English as a potent poetic tool, and reshaped language to alter and enhance the viewer's understanding of the migrant living in Australia's suburbia.

(Fig. 15) © Aleks Danko, 2006, *a birch tree in a field did stand*, from the series *Some cultural meditations 1949-201*5, No. 86, gouache and pencil on paper, 2 parts, 78.5 x 108.5cm & 15 x 70cm (framed).

Analogous to Danko, Griffin's Hungarian mother's dowry also had a distinctive monogram that gave a clear personal indication of ownership and her inherent identity. Griffin (2014) acknowledges there were large gaps in the history of her mother's dowry linen she inherited, and no knowledge of its production and

value, but knew '…it was not produced by any family member or household staff' (p. 03).

> The women of the family (mothers and perhaps aunts and grandmothers) would discuss details such as projected household needs, quantities, fabrics, colours, and styles and sizes of monograms and initials. This work would be consigned to an outside source to complete (p. 03).

Remaking her mother's personal stitched monogram from one of her mother's dowry objects, Griffin began with a large piece of black fabric as a base to represent a pillow cover with embroidered entwined marital initials. The artist's intention was to make the artwork four times the original textile object to emphasise the time and engergy needed to create embroidery. Griffin stated that '…despite the change in scale and materiality, the work retained a connection to the original' (p. 06). In referencing one part of her mother's dowry, the artist stated '…I sought to pay homage to my parents, their former world and the dislocation they experienced' (p. 06). Throughout the making, Griffin endured the loss of feeling in her fingertips during long hours spent replacing each stitch with a small quartz stone, continually correcting errors in the counting and recorrecting placement of the stones (Fig. 16). Griffin's ritualistic handling of stones that represented each stitch allowed for a contemplative and cathartic experience that deepened her understanding of the work involved in creating the monogram and inspired the re-examination of the emotional values

embedded in her familial dowry. While I employed a painting process that replaced each stitch with paint and Griffin replaced each stitch with a small quartz stone, both this artist and myself are transposing aesthetics, perception, senses and changing meaning while slowly enhancing the form of stitched motifs on dowry items, thus shifting the traditional patterns of use that personal objects encourage.

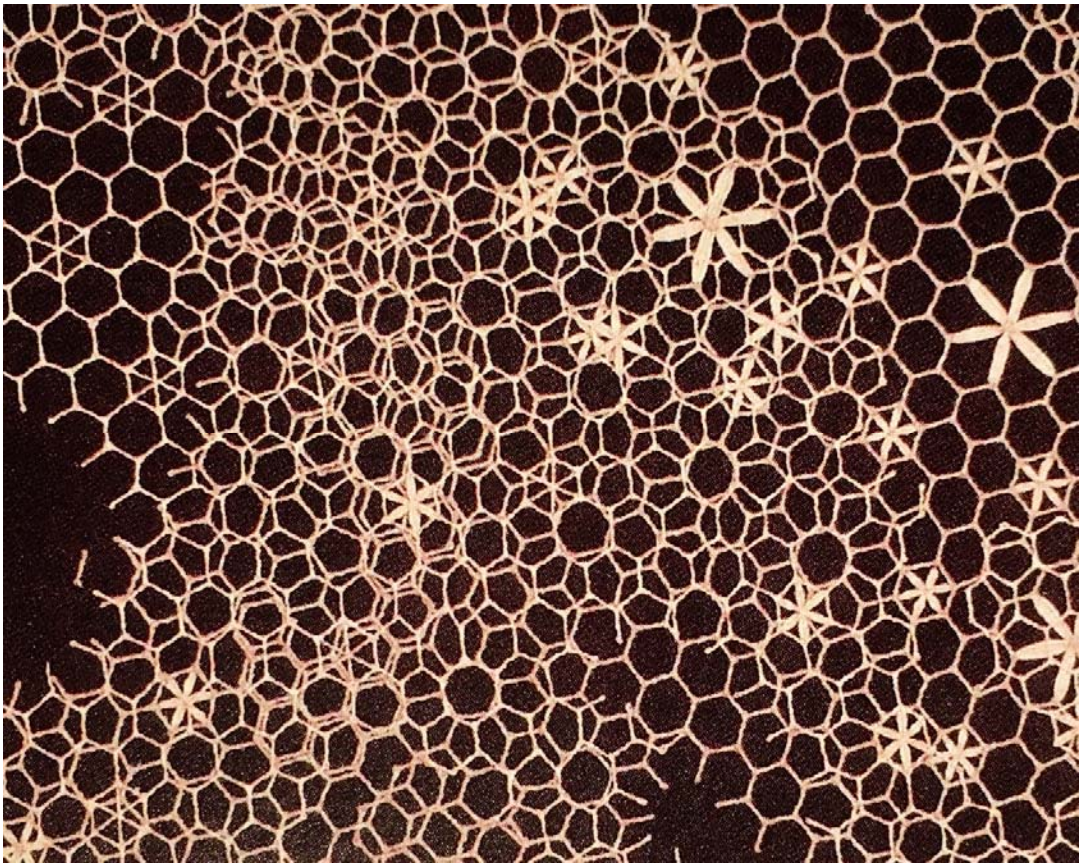
(Fig. 16) © Sylvia Griffin, 2013, *Monogram in stone*, cloth, quartz stones, 40 x 40 cm.

Griffin speaks of her wish to pay homage to her parents and the dislocation they experienced as migrants. The making also provided her with an opportunity '…to explore what it meant for my family to feel the need to leave their homeland and settle in an environment foreign to them in every way' (p. 06).

Elisa Markes-Young also demonstrates the endurance needed to recreate needlework in artworks. Her labour intensive process connects her childhood migration encounters to traditional European textiles. The artist's works extend into complex abstract cross-cultural images formed in acrylic paint, pencil, pastel, wool, cotton and silk on Belgian linen. This artist conveys memory in her images of intertwining lace and net patterns with errors, loose threads and scars in repetitive cultural symbolism that explores nostalgia and loss (Fig. 17). In Mengerson's (2014) essay the author examined the artist's techniques that required both complexity and concentrated focus, together with '...the most humble manual engagement: the needle, the thread, the hand', and how her intuition '…allows for the instability of memory' (p. 11).

> Memory as a poetic rather than a practical rational device evolved in response to a complex personal cross-cultural history, of that threshold space of the immigrant, of the gap between departure and arrival. ...The poetic occurs because, although Markes-Young's work requires the labour of needlecraft, it frees itself from accepted conventions through mimicry, imagination and entropy (p. 11).

Markes-Young's works translated for me how the act of painting stitches can be an alternative dialogue that operates as trace through a performative practice, drawing memory through thread in imperfect pattern structures. Every knot and stitch represents a memory of the past and every gap symbolises a missing piece of memory. As with my paintings of migratory dowry, Markes-Young's works depict an exploration of memory that becomes a metaphor for navigating the complexity of migratory identity and place and her patterns, with unexpected breaks in the knotted threads and faint shadows, lean towards the poetic. Markes-Young refers to her own fallibility of memory and accuracy of stitches and links her memory gaps to Luis Buñuel's 2011 statement '…every time we remember we invent the past' (p. 19).



(Fig. 17) © Elisa Markes-Young, 2010, #28 (detail), *The strange quiet of things misplaced*, (detail), mixed media, 110x110cm.

Anselmi's (2008) Forward essay in Markes-Young's (2013) publication focuses on the artist's mapping of memory through stitches and asserts that the '…changeable nature of memory is often filled with nostalgia which has bearing on how much we remember.' Describing the artist's strategies, the author observes the artist's…recurrent subtle shifts in the design, colour and composition of each work who displayed '…self-identity, memories lost and frayed, and …displacement and presence and absence.' These works documented the artist's migratory story as one work flowed into the next,

keeping the narrative active and relevant as each work was created.

Danko and Griffin have invested in their artworks the memories of their own family's migration travails and Markes-Young's memory work becomes a metaphor for understanding her own migration experiences. These artists' works reference Waugh (2010) who proposes that memory '…cannot exist with the concept of nostalgia' (p.35) and Wilson (2005) who states that memory and nostalgia '…are instrumental in one's quest to know who one is (p. 35).

While I use paint on linen to convey both the women participants and my own migration memories, Danko, Griffin and Markes-Young's art making strategies are akin to mine in that they use repetitive personal marks as an alternative dialogue and draw on memory and nostalgia via both continual and unravelling threads, myriad stitches, small stones and precision paint strokes, and all have experienced migration either personally or via family members.

Context summary

Contemporary artists working with the migrant experience have mainly produced autobiographical works using wide variety of materials in two and three dimensions, employing some painting strategies associated with the still life genre. Such artists who included cloth, timeworn objects and evoked the migrant experience in their works and included, in different ways, the concepts

of memory and nostalgia. All these artisits' works evoked particular ideas associated with the migrant experience and offered inspiration I could build into my paintings but none have specifically used painting to convey the concepts of biography, memory, nostalgia and loss associated with the Tasmanian migrant dowry.

Methodology

A painterly practice

My art practice has consistently explored the social and cultural history of Tasmania via the painting of objects attached to migratory experiences. I collect these migration stories and objects from migrants living in Tasmania, and create paintings of their everyday things to transpose them into objects of significance.

(Fig. 18) © Elizabeth Gray, 2014, *Those with the gift of melancholy notice small ordinary things,* oil on linen, diptych, 120 x 240cm.

In my Honours project I painted the diptych *Those with the gift of melancholy notice small ordinary things* (Fig. 18). It represents a pictorial table top set with ritual objects that waits for the anticipated reunion of loved ones and for the missing. From this painting the simulation of cloth and stitches was still embedded in my memory through recollections of the weight, shape and movement of the paintbrush and how paints and glazes behave when used on stretched linen. These skills were further challenged during the creation of trial paintings in readiness for this project's series of paintings

With a lifetime spent interrelating with migrants, plus personal migration experiences underpinning my art exploration (Frontispiece), I resumed my research of migratory objects by choosing to explore the significance of migrant women's traditional dowry because of its waning importance, probable dispersion and eventual loss.

For this project I sourced material from 12 post Second World War women who migrated to Tasmania mid to late 20th century from Greece, Italy, Belgium, Finland, England, Hungary and Latvia. I met these women through my personal connections with a local migrant community and recommendations. I talked to these women in their homes, where their dowry objects were stored. These conversations gave me invaluable historical, cultural and practical insights into the migrants' stories and memories. (Transcripts of these conversations can be reviewed in *Appendices* in detail, (pp. 146–167). Borrowing dowry objects to arrange studio photography, or painting directly from the original, was not a viable option because these objects are very personal, delicate and irreplaceable. However, I was given permission to photograph and measure the objects *in situ* and developed my paintings from this documentation.

As my studio work progressed, I made further visits to these women to extend my understanding of dowry and the implications for dowry collections when they were no longer in their country of origin. While the initial visits were based

on data gathering which laid the foundation for my paintings, later conversations revealed personal stories of life before and after migration, the assembly of dowry, the history attached to cultural motifs, how and why the intricately embroidered details on dowry were chosen and the style of stitch used to create shapes and the overlaying of colour using silk, cotton and linen threads.

Initial studio preparation

Seeking both traditional and new ways to express dowry in paint, during the first year of my project I referred to Knowles (2007) who asserts:

> Art making as a research method allows for experience directly through the senses (empirically) leading to dialectical interactions between the researched subject and the painted image (p. 549).

I initially developed a practice series of still life oil paintings on small-to-medium size cloth with bases ranging from 20 x 20 to 50 x 50 centimetres. These preliminary painterly sketches were the springboard for further exploration as I immersed myself in dowry cloth folds, embroidered images and stitched threads. *Bridal Dowry*, (Fig. 19a) and *Cutwork Cloth*, (Fig. 19b) plus images in *Appendices*: trial paintings 01, 02, 03, (pp. 188–190).

(Fig. 19a) Elizabeth Gray, 2015, (left) *Bridal dowry*, oil on linen, 15 x 15cm.

These trial paintings were important to ascertain the scale of the linen base and the embroidered images; the choice and positioning of the stitched motifs; the overall background colour and for increasing my painting skills to emulate embroidery stitches using my *paint–for–stitch* strategy. I began to look more closely at cloth construction, stitched images, embroidery patterns and the myriad of coloured threads. These paintings were also important for the

decisions made relating to the scale of the base and embroidered images to ensure the texture of the linen base was revealed in the painterly cloth image. Other tests required decisions regarding the positioning of the stitched motifs; the overall background colour; the continual practice of painting embroidery stitches using my *paint-for-stitch* process; the application of opaque paints; the drying time between each layer of paint and the application of glaze.

Using the painterly techniques practised in my small sketches, I planned paintings of life–size dowry objects to both emphasise and personally experience the manual labour involved in the embroidering of dowry collections. Scale was a key painting strategy. It was essential the painted images were the actual size and colour to ensure authenticity and to effectively capture time and memory and to emphasise the importance of dowry's cultural embroidered imagery.

Creating large paintings in single, diptych and triptych formats requires formal decisions about pictorial space, patina, background surface, the structure of folded and draped cloth and how to best express in oil paint the migrants' embroidered imagery and narratives and sentiments. Particular artists who influenced the way I created large pictorial spaces were Watt's (Fig. 11) expanses of painted cloth on cloth and Hodges' installation dispersed across a wall (Fig. 13).

(Fig. 19b) Elizabeth Gray, 2015, (right) *Cutwork cloth*, oil on linen, 12 x 12cm.

Opening up dowry narratives

Following my initial visit to the migrant women, further conversations offered poignant stories attached to their precious dowry collections., I deliberated over what strategies I could use to create a suite of paintings that expressed the their recollections of how the significance of dowry remained in their lives from early childhood, marriage, migration and aging in a country not of their birth.

Choosing a chronological arrangement to emphasise a lifetime of the women's continual association with heirlooms and dowry, I made known in paint their early stitching years spent creating samplers and the making of a dowry before marriage and migration to Tasmania. I expressed how they live in the present yet are still attached to the nostalgic past. I exposed their interior cultural traditions and routines through the laying of the festive table and eventually lured their memories to the surface as they aged in a country far from their ancestral home.

Continually studying, reassessing, questioning and practising a range of painting methods and their effectiveness for expressing my ideas, I made ready to transform the migrant women's precious objects into a series of painted images that evoke dowry's complex cultural, historical, personal and nostalgic significance. Fred Davis (1979) suggests nostalgia in art needs a memory of the past to be aligned with some detachment when recreating emotive objects.

> Speaking of the language of art … the referential status of nostalgia's symbols, like most other symbolic forms in the arts, is a good deal more vague and ambiguous. Indeed, it could be argued …this heightened vagueness and ambiguity of reference are precisely what makes art rather than mere communication (p. 82).

Heeding Davis' reference to the language of art, I initially began painting the images mostly actual-size and in colours that equated with the botanical and geometric patterns on the women's dowry. An important strategy to contemplate before I ventured too far was how to create emotive content in these paintings. Imagination linked to emotion plays a central role in the act of painting. According to Gordon Graham (2005) in his text about philosophy, art and aesthetics, it is through imagination and construction that the artist transforms undefined emotion into an articulate expression through the self.

> The process of artistic creation is thus not a matter of making external what already exists internally, which is how the simple model construes it, but a process of imaginative discovery. And since the psychic disturbance with which it begins is the artist's, art is a process of *self*-discovery (p. 42).

Portraying dowry in the still life genre

The decision to create a series of paintings of the women's dowry in the still life genre flowed from my Honours research painting, (2014) (Fig. 18), where the silence of the tablecloth calls for stillness as the migrants remember 'home'. It represents the setting of the table for an anticipated reunion of loved ones and illuminates the 'after the event' realisation that this reunion was a myth. This painting aligns with my current project where I demonstrate that the still life genre is an appropriate methodology for painting migratory objects.

The intrinsic properties of still life require a dialogue to gradually develop between the image and the viewer through observation and contemplation. Only when dowry is interpreted does it have meaning. It is the incarnation of experience that was brought to life through interpreted reflections that has the capacity to stimulate memory and nostalgia. These concepts align with Somers (2010) belief that still life does not hold its value as an image alone; rather, '…it needs to be seen and experienced by viewers to expand and encapsulate various forms of participating art experience' (p. 04). Woodley (2012) further suggests

> …the genre of still life is one of those worlds to which we can bring our own, and with which trans-historical conversation and transformation can take place in the making of new art (p. 09).

To physically draw the viewer up close to my still life paintings, I use oil paints to capture the sheen of the silk and cotton embroidery images, because the glazing capacity of oil paint is closely related to the expressive capacity of coloured silk and cotton threads. The dancing behaviour of light in the layers of paint and glaze is similar to the light on several layers of silk and cotton threads embroidered on dowry cloth. I photocopied selected images from my initial photographs of the embroidered dowry objects and cut them up freely and repositioned them at will, both initially and during the painting process, to

transform the paintings into representations of dowry cloth embedded with stitched motifs (Fig. 20).

The painting process is very physical. I not only see the development of brush marks, I also feel the paint as it slides and furles across the linen base, creating surface impressions. I have very little control over the behaviour of drying paint. It is an evolutionary process that slowly reveals previous brush marks, and alterations to image and layers of colour changes, over a long period of time.

Like historical paintings where we might see faint images of earlier paintings, altering embroidery is similar. If the needleworker wants to change an earlier stitching of the dowry cloth, it is unpicked**.** When a painted image needs to be altered, I use the *pentimento* process. Traditionally *pentimenti* are alterations in painting that become apparent through traces of previous workings, like tiny scars that are left on cloth after unpicking thread. These memory markers in paint become shadowed reminders of previous marks when they are over–painted. As the oil paint slowly dries, faint marks of these 'removed' images can reappear on the surface of the painting

(Fig. 20) © Elizabeth Gray, 2015 – 2017, segments of photocopied dowry motifs, image, Elizabeth Gray.

An example of *Pentimenti* can be seen in *Migrating memories* (Fig. 29), within the 'cloud' background. Having completed my initial research and experiments in paint on cloth, I was ready to begin painting a series of still life painting in earnest.

Phase 1 – the literal interpretation of dowry

The important experimental stage of creating small still life painting revealed that this series of migratory dowry needed to be actual size because any reduction to the myriad of stitches and threads would result in mere dots and lines of crushed colour. This would diminish the cultural significance and beauty of the motifs and alter the intensity I expected to expend painting the dowry motifs.

My initial thoughts for the first painting of stacked dowry, entitled *Yearning* (Fig. 21), related to Bachelard's (1994) description of piles of folded cloth and my memory of the constant amazement felt each time I was exposed to cupboards, cardboard boxes and trunks filled with dowry objects belonging to the migrant women as they expressed their nostalgic yearning for earlier times 'back home'. Yearning is an intense longing for something, some place or someone left behind. According to Davis (1979) nostalgia also occurs during times of transition, such as migration.

> Although nostalgia draws from the past, it is quite clearly a product of the present. It is always evoked in the context of current fears and anxieties and looks to alleviate those fears by using the past in specially constructed ways (p. 146).

Davis gives a comprehensive study of memory, and claims nostalgic memory is not an ordinary memory, rather it is a particular form of recollection and in Wilson's (2005) study of memories the author contends that through recollection we '…play with the past' (p. 01). Re-reading the notes of my interviews with the migrant women, I am reminded their nostalgic memories lie at the very core of migratory dowry that can bring memories of the past into the present as they reconstruct their earlier lives through their dowry collections. Through paint, I create a sense of the women's emotions through the choice and placement of embroidered cultural and personal motifs on dowry cloth or floating free.

Opening up dowry storylines

Utilising the linen base as a painting substrate to reinforce the materiality of the subject allowed me to closely examine and experience the structure of cloth and to feel the sheer physicality of painting stitched and embroidered dowry objects. The way I planned to paint images of cloth on a stretched linen base was influenced by the cloth paintings of Watt (Fig. 11). This artist has an enduring

obsession about paint on cloth – as drapery, swathes and folds – with no extraneous images, simply pure white cloth. While my painterly treatment of cloth is similar to Watt's, in that I allow the canvas base to remain visible despite the layers of paint needed to create shadows caused by folds, to reinforce the materiality of dowry, I implant in the painting the emotions of nostalgia, memory and longing through painterly stains of age, fragmented embroidered motifs, unravelling threads and the wear and fray of the cloth.

The first step, as in all my paintings, was to organise how the embroidered imagery would fit on the painted base of the linen. The photocopies from my photographs of dowry collections (Fig. 20), afforded me the freedom to cut the motifs into separate images and place them in various trial compositions. Using this method I was able to ascertain what motif best fitted my meaning for each painting. While photographs offered images of partial and complete dowry imagery, it was the mixing and matching of embroidered motifs free from the dowry cloth base, that allowed me the freedom to compose and recompose as each painting progressed.

I used thin transparent *Raw Umber* paint to sketch the folded cloth shapes onto the prepared linen base. Next I applied layers of opaque paint – a process known as scumbling – to fill in the *Titantium White* cloth background, allowing each layer to dry, followed by the embroidery shapes and lines in thin *Raw Umber* to create shadows between each piece of folded cloth for a three dimensional

effect. I then began the process of 'colouring in' with opaque paint using my intensive *paint-for-stitch* process. When dry, I applied thin layers of transparent paint, again allowing each layer to dry. Painting large scale linen bases allowed me to work on any part of the painting while waiting for paint to dry in other areas because the slow painting process allowed for drying time anywhere on the surface of the linen. When the painting was surface dry, (this took two months in the studio), I mixed a combination of one-third linseed oil, one-third turpentine and one-third *Damar* varnish with transparent oil paint to make a transparent oil glaze. I painted the glaze over the partial or whole images, waited a few minutes for the evaporation of the solvent, then add more colour if further enhancement was needed. I have used glaze to heighten the nostalgic quality of dowry. Glazing is an emotive illusory method of painting that increases the intensity of colour embedded in the embroidered motifs that are raised up slightly by the subtle blur of *Raw Umber* shadows.

My *paint-for-stitch* technique ensured I was engaged with the painting of the dowry objects and embroidery stitching for three years. Repetitive painting is my way of uttering something beyond words to interpret the participants' memories and nostalgic stories embedded in their dowry objects. Often, when painting, I was conscious of the words used by Giunta and Sciorra (2014) when describing embroidering and stitching. '…needlework can function as an artefact of the imagination, a repository of dreams, hopes, disappointments, desires It is the material for memory' (p. 4).

(Fig. 21) Elizabeth Gray, 2015, *Yearning,* oil on canvas, 124 x 65 cm.

While cultural imagery is traditionally stitched into dowry objects, each woman has her own method of stitchery using colour, pattern, line and botanical imagery. Every thread is encoded with individual energy and imagination I can manipulate to create a sense of movement, unravelling and release.

Using this painting technique, I endured intense concentration, blurred vision, cramped fingers and neck tension that paralleled the demanding experience of embroidering on cloth. Painting myriad infinitesimal stitches I realised how technically difficult creating dowry could be. It requires rigorous mathematical ability to create and embroider symbols and physical endurance to persist with the repetition of a threaded needle piercing cloth and pulling through to make one stitch.

Stitching samplers

Recalling my years living and working as an artist in Europe during 2002–2006, mainly in Italy with sojourns to Germany, Switzerland and France, I have reminisced about the interiors of small European hotels, private homes and the Italian farmhouse where I lived. Huge beams, wooden doorways and small windows framed with handmade lace curtains; white walls adorned with framed 'story-telling' needlework; rustic, tiled floors and dark, solid wooden furniture adorned with white lace and embroidered cloths. The sunlit windows and the dark surfaces of the furniture enhanced the see-through patterns of lace and

draped white cloths embroidered with images representing cyclical gardens. Blending my memories with the migrant women's conversations about their early stitching skills that began with both home and school learning, I discovered the importance of samplers. A sampler is a stitched and embroidered piece of linen or cotton cloth used to demonstrate needlework skills.

Begun as a young school girl and continuing into womanhood, the maker's sampler usually included numerical and alphabetical marks, cultural motifs, personal designs, decorative borders and her name and date of completion. G. M. Jeffries' photograph (Fig. 02) portrays her mother as a young schoolgirl in Sicily attending a day school of embroidery at the local convent where samplers were used to teach embroidery techniques from age of six to twelve years. The art of stitching was continued in the home under the tutelage of older women to ensure a comprehensive bridal dowry is completed.

Not an embroiderer myself, I needed to know how it felt physically, emotionally and mentally to create a needlework sampler, so I replicated a young girl's early stitching skills. I combined the image of a small, unfinished sampler belonging to a migrant participant, a partial image of a *Spot Motif Sampler* in Carol Humphrey's (1997) *Samplers* (Fig. 05) and a variety of stitched motifs from the migrant women's dowry collections. (Some of these dowry motifs would have originally been practiced on a sampler). I planned a painterly story of European girls and young women destined to marry and migrate. The colours and size of

my painted stitched images equated with the botanical and geometric patterns on dowry because, in this painting, I sought actual embroidered motifs to immerse myself in the creation of stitchery using paint and to familiarise myself with pattern formation. As these young girls used thread, I used paint to create embroidered images.

I chose a diptych arrangement in this painting, *History* (Fig. 22), to emphasise the two sections of the women's lives – before and after migration. The left panel of the diptych depicts a traditional sampler embroidered from early school years to marriage and includes historical, cultural and family motifs that reveal the years of rendering via faded and loose threads, wear, stains and the marks of unpicking. The dowry images I selected to convey a young girl's early stitching lessons using numerical and alphabetical imagery, simple sewing techniques, border stitching and images that display advanced skills as the stitching began fill the sampler cloth. The right panel illustrates mainly embroidered 'Australiana' images and personal designs such as garden produce and native animals that tell of the bride's new life in Tasmania.

Beginning the diptych of samplers. I took advantage of the woven linen surface and painted thin layers of *Yellow Ochre* and *Lamp Black* oil paint, wet paint over wet, to bond the colours to a muted dark background. When dry, I dabbed *Transparent Rose* and *Transparent Alizarin Crimson* in an irregular pattern. To create a warmish background to the cloth sampler images, I added several thin

coats of *Transparent Permanent Rose* and overlaid a final coat of *Transparent Geranium*. The background for the two cloth samplers was painted in several layers of thin white paint, and the folds and shadows were created with *Transparent Raw Umber* and *Opaque Naples Yellow* and a touch of *Transparent Rose* around the ragged edges of the sampler to blend the cloth into the background.

(Fig. 22) Elizabeth Gray, 2016, *History*, oil on linen, diptych 150 x100 cm.

On the left panel of *History* (detail) (Fig. 23), I highlighted flaws in the stitchery to represent the wear of the cloth, pattern errors, weary stitching, signs of unpicking and correcting, the needle pricking blood stain and the ragged edges and stains that accumulated during the years it takes to complete a sampler.

(Fig. 23) Elizabeth Gray, 2016, *History*, oil on linen, 150 x 50 cm, (detail left panel of diptych).

Typical stitching experience for young girls included initials, the alphabet and numbers and geometric and floral images, gradually advancing to white-on-white bridal dowry and cutwork.[5] Constantly unpicking stitches and mending errors, the hopeful, promised or betrothed young women developed skills for serious embroidery patterns as fundamental preparation of the bridal dowry.

On the right panel of *History* (detail) (Fig. 24), referencing the conversations I had with migrant women, I represented the arrival of the betrothed and newly married migrant women in Tasmania who were bombarded with foreign sounds, scents, weather, landscape, plants, animals and people. Some women expressed being overwhelmed and resorted to the comforting process of domestic sewing and mending. Other women embraced their new life and embroidered images of domestic life, such as backyard fowls and fruit and vegetables common to both European and Tasmanian households mixed with native bird and animal images. Wanting to express in my painting their new life in a foreign country, these embroidered symbols were based on my interpretation of the migrant women's stories of their early domestic life in Tasmania. The sampler's stitched images were glazed with *Transparent Yellow* oil paint brushstrokes to symbolise the intense glare of the Tasmanian sun.

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[5] Cutwork embroidery, also known at *Punto Tagliato* in Italian, is a needlework technique in which parts of an image, usually on cotton or linen, are cut away using tiny scissors resulting in a 'hole', which is reinforced and filled in with embroidery or lacework.

(Fig. 24) Elizabeth Gray, 2016, *History,* oil on linen, 150 x 50 cm, (detail right panel of diptych).

The tangle of threads in the diptych is my representation of the migrant women's experiences of acculturation that can lead to nostalgic memories of an

earlier life and the loss of daily personal connections with family and relatives 'back home'. Unravelled threads function as a metaphor for the migration experience, particularly the red threads that represent family bloodlines.

Painterly folded and stored bridal dowry

I planned a larger, more detailed stack of dowry cloth based on my initial experience of painting embellished folded dowry in an earlier painting, *Yearning,* (Fig. 21). Stacks of folded cloth imply human presence through their structural form of folded shapes, lines, texture, patterns and rhythms. In *Nostalgia* (Fig. 25), I planned to emboss these folds of linen, lace and sheer cloths with exposed weave, stitched geometric and floral motifs and loose threads that speak of the makers and invoke moods, memories and nostalgia.

I focussed on the concept of nostalgia that is firmly embedded in dowry collections, referencing such theorists' views on nostalgia as Boym (2007) asserts nostalgic feelings are both a physical and spiritual longing. Wilson (2005) proposes that memory and nostalgia are necessary components for knowing who you are and Waugh (2011) associates nostalgia with migration.

(Fig. 25) Elizabeth Gray, 2016, *Nostalgia*, oil on linen, 166 x 70 cm.

The background of *Nostalgia* (Fig. 25) is based on traditional hand stencilled wallpaper commonly used as lining for linen cupboards, trunks and chests. I discovered these stencils during my stay in Hungary 1970, and later in a Northern Italian village 2002-2006. The wallpaper acts as an *aide-mémoire* for remembering particular moments of an irrecoverable past and the beginning of narrative pertaining to the stored folded cloth, the toil of needlework and the creation of bridal dowry. To emphasise the weight of responsibility facing the migrant bride, including the never-ending making and caring dowry demands, I painted the folded dowry to extend beyond the top edge of the frame, heightening the sense of claustrophobia and restriction.

This painting in particular reminded me of how demanding and time-consuming completing a collection of embroidered dowry could be. My efforts were surface marks with soft paint on cloth; the women's marks required needle and thread to pierce the cloth twice to make one stitch. The haptic quality of *Nostalgia* (Fig. 25) and the previous stack of folded dowry *Yearning* (Fig. 21) is incorporated into and underpinned by the paintings' linen base as a visual reminder of the textile nature and feel of the embroiderers' creations and how much the texture of the cloth changed as their fingers spent hours working into it.

(Fig. 26) Elizabeth Gray, 2016, *Nostalgia* (detail), oil on linen, 166 x 70 cm.

Nostalgia is fundamentally an aesthetic memory experience that can link to an artist's imagination, therefore some degree of artistic detachment allows me to appreciate dowry for its own sake, without any consideration of ownership or personal usefulness. My paintings have aimed to be a source of story telling and a pivot for evoking memories and feelings of nostalgia. While nostalgia is often

defined as a cultural illness, with reference to the authors who have written extensively on the subject, I believe nostalgia is inevitable because the human mind appears programmed to relive the past.

During the painting of *Nostalgia* (Fig. 26) I was mindful of including important trace elements– the stained, faded, torn, mended and worn, all imprints of the years the women spent stitching dowry, as well as the daily and ceremonial use of items and their laundering and storage. The evidence of these imprints played a crucial role for they can invoke memories of someone, something or a time in the past that triggers the feeling of nostalgia through dowry objects.

Phase 2 – the gradual unravelling of stitches and dispersal of images

In Phase 1 – *the literal interpretation of dowry*, my mode of inquiry into dowry was initially heavily reliant on personal narratives of the migrant women, in the paintings *Yearning,* (Fig. 21), *History,* (Fig. 22) and *Nostalgia,* (Fig. 25), where I experimented with a literal approach to achieving the aims of the project. As the studio work progressed, I sought new strategies to more powerfully evoke memory associated with dowry and effectively evoke nostalgic sentiments in my Phase 2 paintings.

Migratory threads and stitches

Before I began this triptych *Floating* (Fig. 27), I revisited the notes of my interviews with the migrant women, who migrated to Tasmania as betrothed or newly married proxy brides, to find a way of expressing their life changing journeys. I aimed to create a sense of risk in the work by releasing the migrant women's embroidered motifs across an expansive pictorial space as they transition from young girls leaving home to new wives in a land far from their family and culture.

Reading the triptych *Floating* in a classic manner from left to right, it begins by symbolising the elation of the migrant women's perilous journeys with their valuable dowries and the promise of a good and long marriage. The migrant women, betrothed or married, set forth towards a new land and life despite moments of doubt. The middle panel represents the fear the women felt about the unknown. The scattering of their confidence and dreams and the heightening anxiety as they journey towards husbands, either known or unknown. There is heightened nostalgia for a home that is both physical and spiritual and mourning for the unlikelihood of returning home. Davis (1979) suggests that nostalgia is usually evoked at transitional points in life that generate fears and anxieties and is often used to reconstruct the past.

The right panel celebrates the eventual meeting of the newly engaged or married women whose migratory dreams dip, soar, expand or wither as they accept their

new position as wife in a place offering myriad possibilities. I began with the application of a thin coat of *Titanium White* to each of the three (150 x 150 centimetres each) panels of stretched linen.

(Fig. 27) Elizabeth Gray, 2016/2017, *Floating*, oil on linen, triptych, 150 x 450 cm.

The base coat was overlaid with thin opaque *Golden Yellow* and transparent *Geranium Lake* along the lower edge of the panel, while ensuring the linen base texture remained evident. I emphasised the 'figure-ground' relationship by creating a contrast between the positive space (figure) and the negative space (background) to organise placement of the images.

(Fig. 28) Elizabeth Gray, 2016/2017, *Floating,* (detail), oil on linen, triptych, each panel 150 x 150 cm.

The choice of floral motifs scattered across the triptych was based on their size, colour and beauty and their capacity to become fragmented into large and small pieces of petal, leaf, stalk and bud, yet retain some semblance of their original shape.

To create a sense of free falling and unravelling, these motifs were informally positioned to represent a life changing migratory journey left to chance. To further enhance a sense of disorder I mixed and matched various cultural designs using sections of motifs, altering the colour and leaving some motifs unfinished, until most of the embroidered images reverted to mere outlines and threads in a multitude of colours. I painted the stitched images unravelling, floating and falling to evoke a sense of loss resulting from the loosening of personal connections to 'back home'. When these motifs were painted into position and dry to touch, I added very thin brush marks of *Transparent Yellow* near them to create that particular light a human eye sees when coming into the dim indoors, blinking after the intense Tasmanian sun rays.

Finally, to create a depth of colour across the three panels and bring the floating motifs forward, I used glaze (a fusion of linseed oil, turpentine and *Damar* varnish) mixed with chosen transparent oil paint colours to affect a play of light and create a sense that the embroidered motifs could be disembodied floating witnesses.

To create an illusion of flight and space in this painting, I became the choreographer of stitched motifs that grouped together, unfolded, separated, dispersed, floated on air, flew, soared, dipped, dropped, circled, went forward and backward. Some fragmented into scattering bits, others unfolded and became unpicked curled threads and others retained the semblance of a

previous shape that represented the impermanence of all things. Some motifs floated into the light, keeping together as support for the looming unknown of migrating across land, sky and sea.

Migrating memories

My aim for this painting *Migrating memories* (Fig. 29), was to represent the women's everyday nostalgic memories of family, homeland, their momentous journey to a far away island not of their birth and the continual longing for home.

I used paint to evoke beauty embedded in each of these restless stitched motifs. The embroidered images I chose for this painting needed to appear strong, be mainly singular and have a shape that would enhance the 'impression that they are flying. I elongated the stalks of the flowers, petals and leaves and wound painterly threads around these images that unravelled as they dipped down, rose up and flew across and into a 'cloud–like' surface.

(Fig. 29) Elizabeth Gray, 2017, *Migrating memories*, oil on linen, 150 x 150 cm.

I scaled up the embroidered images by altering my *paint-for-stitch* process to create longer overlaying stitches and trailing and winding loose threads. I created some of these embroidery images larger than life–size to highlight the materiality of the painting process and to vary the spatial surface.

(Fig. 30) Elizabeth Gray, 2017, *Migrating memories*, (detail), oil on linen, 150 x 150 cm.

While magnifying the floral imagery, I aimed to ensure they remained recognisable, and retained their beauty. I painted a 'cloud' background to create another dimension where the embroidery images were cast adrift to represent the nostalgic memories of the women migrants.

In *Phase 2* – the gradual unravelling of stitches and dispersal of images, I have endeavoured to convey a sense of nostalgia and loss via the women's stitched dowry objects that prompt memories of their past lives.

While the embroidered motifs are mainly historical and cultural images from their birth country, the maker's preparation and individual performance of

stitching on a variety of cloth structures, alters their chosen image through small or dramatic changes to the scale, colours, types of threads, individual stitching practices and the decision to proceed or leave the work unfinished. This information gleaned from conversations with the women allowed me to also proceed as they did when stitching dowry – making decisions as the painting evolved. I chose motifs that display marks of duration and stains, fragmented images, loose threads and the signs of unpicking. From a memorable tiny petal, stamen, leaf, a single thread, a bee, geometric shapes, to large exotic floral images**.**

Phase 3 – bringing the stitched motifs back to dowry cloth

In *Floating* (Fig. 27), I symbolically removed the restrictive traditions belonging to dowry and set the illusory motifs free. In *Migrating memories* (Fig. 29), I tell of migratory memories nostalgically searching for home, neither here nor there. In the following paintings I bring the embroidered images back to dowry cloth in the form of a family heirlooms. *As breath* (Fig. 31), represents the family tablecloth and *Longing* (Fig. 33), symbolises dowry lace collections and heirlooms. I created two small scale paintings, each with a single image. *Upturn,* (Fig. 35), reveals the ageing and mending of dowry after continual use. *Remember* (Fig. 36), displays the familial stitching of monogrammed ownership.

Painting stitches is a kind of breathing

As I worked on the project, painterly stitching became a kind of breathing for me – each stitch an inhalation of air followed by several paint–mark stitches, before exhalation in readiness for more in-breath stitches.

As Breath (Fig. 31), was painted in landscape format on a stretched linen base to represent the family table with the traditional lace tablecloth laid over coloured patterned under-cloth to better display the makers' intricate patterns. Used for celebratory occasions, the lace and embroidered patterns represent and revive memories of other family gatherings many years ago. Through my personal experience living as a migrant in Europe (p. 01), I experienced these ritual occasions with new foreign friends and over time my memories of home and family, nostalgia for the everyday minutiae of living in Tasmania and feelings of inexplicable loss became heightened. While time and years cannot be retrieved, the ritual of laying the cloth can be repeated whenever the emotional need arises.

Ritual activities are a customary way of celebrating a traditional culture. Ritual permeates our private and public lives. It is an act that requires a conscious awareness of its symbolic and emotional meaning and is a measure of one's daily life and years of collective experience. Ritual helps to reorient, stabilise and gather reassurance within this enactment. While time and years cannot be retrieved, the ritual of laying the cloth over the dining table can be repeated

whenever the emotional need arises. Through memory we can re-imagine these important daily rituals that help us construct a narrative of the past and draw it into the present.

My strategy for painting the pictorial tabletop, was to use the plane of illusion to produce the tension of a skewed reality, to add a 3-dimensionality to the painting's flat surface and to create depth of vision by the painting of images-over-images to create depth of vision.

The background to *As breath* (Fig. 31) began with *Raw Umber* oil paint to create a base for the stencilled background and give depth and imagery to the cloth that was overlaid with several thin layers of *Transparent Alizarin Crimson*. Immersing myself into the painting, I used a small piece of old lace from my personal linen collection to gradually cover the entire surface with its pattern. The stencilled red background colour alludes to blood relations and deep feelings as memories become ensnared in the dowry netting, connecting past stitches to the present.

(Fig. 31) Elizabeth Gray, 2017, *As breath,* oil on linen, 80 x 150 cm.

This imagined unfinished white netted lace overlay of twisted and loose threads, open spaces and tight knots, were painted over some areas of the embroidered background cloth to settle amongst the stitched motifs. I added a darker lower edge to the tablecloth to represent the geographic boundary lines migration creates. To emphasise this disruptive experience I added deep shadows to evoke a sense of doubt about nationality and place. To emphasise this disruptive experience, I added deep shadows to evoke a sense of nostalgia about nationality and home in earlier times. It is around the table where narratives are constructed that bring memories of the past into the present. The netting imagery used to overlay and capture the stitched motifs, references the migrant women's lace collections including lace tablecloths, doylies and lace insertions in cloth table runners (Fig. 06).

As breath represents the 'laying of best cloth' at family rituals and celebratory occasions. I left some areas of the painting unfinished with fragments of pattern missing to represent the broken links and spaces attached to memory. Painting the various stitched patterns and cultural images can be a way of identifying and recording them to preserve the dowries of the migrant women.

(Fig. 32) Elizabeth Gray, 2017, *As breath,* (detail), oil on linen, 80 x 150 cm.

Lace as legacy

The painting *Longing***,** (Fig. 33), is an extension panel to be hung near the right side of *As breath*, (Fig. 31), because it has links with the stitched dowry motifs, lace and netting in that painting. As lace making was a specialised skill, none of the migrant women included in this research project created the lace contained within their dowry collections (Fig. 06).

The migrant women's lace collections were family heirlooms from earlier generations of women who stitched, embroidered, crocheted and made lace for private clients seeking specialised dowry items, including ceremonial lace for the church. Many households had lace curtains and tablecloths. These were usually machine made and perhaps trimmed with handmade lace, but were most often crocheted from a single cotton or linen yarn using a crochet hook to create patterns similar to lace. Using bobbins, lace objects were made by the looping and twisting of very fine silk or cotton threads into pre-determined patterns.

Because this painting is linked to *As Breath* (Fig. 31), through imagery of stitched dowry lace and netting, the background was created with the same stencilled processes and oil paint colours, but with less layers of paint to expose the weave of the linen and allow the lace to come forward in the picture plane. I selected rare pieces of lace from Chantale's dowry collection (Fig. 06), for this painting and chose to express lace without dowry cloth because lace is often considered the most precious of all dowry objects therefore it was not for regular domestic

use. Lace was sometimes used as trimming for special occasions clothes such as bridal, christening and confirmation gowns but unpicked from these gowns and stored carefully for further occasions. Lace was also draped over and carefully looped around burial shrouds while the body lay in state for the mourners' viewing and most often the lace was removed before burial.

(Fig. 32) Elizabeth Gray, 2017, *Longing,* oil on linen, 80 x 80 cm.

In *Longing* I re-examined my painting strategies for representing memory and nostalgia. As an essential human condition, nostalgia creates the notion of longing. Waugh (2010) suggests longing is an essential human condition that is a flawed structure woven into the fabric of memory and nostalgia.

(Fig. 34) Elizabeth Gray, 2017, *Longing* (detail), oil on linen, 80 x 80 cm.

While *Longing* aims to celebrate the beauty, delicacy and perfection of dowry lace, it also exposes the broken links in its structure, its imperfections, incompleteness and fragmented patterns, its frayed stitches and discreet stains of age and use, and its unravelling threads and the lost spaces in between. The handmade lace is positioned on the far right and not in full view, because lace is stored away from light and is seldom on display because of its fragility. True lace is almost extinct. It is now considered as historical heritage or a craft learned for pleasure

Trace of a needleworker

In *Upturn* (Fig. 35), I explored the idea of the underside of reverse memory. The 'going back' in memory to the other side of the world where a day here is night there and where centuries of cultural beliefs and daily life patterns were altered and upended. Advanced age is often a time of life-review and a search for meaning. For migrant elders this can take place in a cultural context attached to their dowry objects. There will always be a sense of loss, but family, dowry objects and the recognition of factors that motivated migration in the first place may compensate for that sorrow.

I deliberately chose to paint both *Upturn* (Fig. 35) and *Remember* (Fig. 36), on small 20 x 20cm linen bases, each with a single actual size dowry image. I created these paintings in small scale to draw the viewer into an intimate

nearness. A small painting permits the contradictory sensations of nearness and distance to be experienced simultaneously and allows for mental exploration and an unlimited flow of responses free from the complexity of the combined imagery evident in the much larger paintings for this project.

(Fig. 35) Elizabeth Gray, 2017, *Upturn*, oil on linen, 20 x 20 cm

Waugh (2011) states that to physically hold an object from the past is to uncover real and imagined memories and proposes that through this experience

> …one can feel a powerful weight – an aura, but it is also to be held captive by promises of an unattainable homecoming shrouding the potential that the future holds (p. 28).

Nostalgic memories of earlier times, the mourning of displacement and its irreversibility, lie at the very core of migratory dowry.

Once again employing the stencilled background process used in the paintings *As Breath* (Fig. 31), and *Longing* (Fig. 34), I began *Upturn* (Fig. 35) with Transparent Raw Umber oil paint to create a base for the stencilled background. This was overlaid with several thin layers of Transparent Alizarin Crimson that gradually darkened the surround to bring forward the single painted dowry image of the doyley. These darkening layers allowed the background colour to seep into the cloth base of the doyley, staining the whiteness to create a sense of the doyley cloth having worn thin over the years.

I exposed the underside of the doyley's embroidery to reveal customary women's work of criss-crossed threads with ends left to fray, knots, loose stitches, a sewn maintenance patch and an irregular edge caused by lost stitches. The underside of this doyley conveys the retrievable past, the criss-crossing of

cultures and the memories of the women now slowly becoming a tangle of connected and disconnected threads.

The painting *Remember* (Fig. 36), relates to the way we remember and how it is constantly being distorted. This distortion can lead to longing for a past life and home, friends and family. It is easy to become emotional about a particular era and choose to idealise that specific time in one's life. Yet the past is as elusive as the future. Always yearned for, it keeps us from the truth of our lives now and the reality of our memories, our remembering.

I explored how dowry objects acquire similar or new meanings and a sense of practicality when they are moved to an alien culture. They can reclaim a sense of 'home' through domestic rituals and dowry objects still bonded to *Domenica*, (meaning *Sunday* in the Italian language). It is always a special day for the migrant women and their families and on special occasions 'best' cloths are used at the table. Also on Sunday, the laying of fresh bed linen ensured absolute cleanliness for the ritual of church attendance, followed by a festive lunch and the gathering of relatives and friends.

(Fig. 36) Elizabeth Gray, 2017, *Remember,* oil on linen, 20 x 20 cm.

In this painting I aimed to create a small personal object to evoke a mix of the past, love and pathos, secret things, memory, nostalgia and biography.

Customarily, the bed linens in dowry collections were embroidered with a personal mark of the owner, either as a blend of single initials of the betrothed, entwined initials of the married couple or as hereditary family monograms. On a monogrammed dowry object, *Eleni* (Fig. 04), the owner used her first name

initial as the bride to be, and her chosen husband's family name initial to create the embroidered initials, E. K. thus establishing ownership of her dowry and expressing her future status as a wife.

The core of this thesis opens up a dialogue about migratory dowry and its role in post Second World War migration to Tasmania, be it a memory, a story, a piece of stitched cloth, underscored by an inquiry into the characteristics of the unpredictable nature of memory often filled with nostalgia. Through the act of painting migratory dowry imagery, life histories are recreated and documented that act as stimuli for reflection and recollection that transposes dowry from inert objects to transcendent historical motifs.

Methodology conclusion

Using the illusory still life genre and the power of paint, I have created traditional cultural motifs in contemporary forms to enable women's dowry to transition from a traditional place into the contemporary arts field. This series of paintings, described in 3 phases, conveys dowry as a domestic symbol of the past that ultimately becomes a biographical tool to link post Second World War migration to Tasmania and the migrant women' dowry collections.

In *Phase 1*, my paintings begin as literal interpretations of dowry in the traditional form - dowry samplers intended for young girls to practice their

needlework skills revealed in the diptych *History* (Fig. 22). In the painting *Yearning* (Fig. 21), piles of folded, embellished cloth signify the years young women spend preparing dowry items that may lead to a good marriage. The painting *Nostalgia* (Fig. 25) I focuses on the nostalgic feelings associated with a stack of dowry objects embedded with the imprint of use and age that trigger a longing for home that now exists only as memory.

In *Phase 2*, I unravel the stitches and disperse the embroidered images by releasing the stitched images that slowly separate from their supportive base into an arrangement of motifs with miscounted stitches, unravelling threads and free floating forms that disrupt the repetitive patterns of traditional dowry to more strongly communicate migratory journeys. In *Floating* (Fig. 27) I release the migrant women's embroidered imagery across 3 panels of pictorial space as they transition from young women into wives in a land far from home. *Migrating memories* (Fig. 29) represents the women's everyday meandering memories of migration and family, searching for home, as they grow old in a foreign country.

Phase 3 brings the scattered stitched motifs back to the dowry cloth. *As breath* (Fig. 31) represents the ritual of laying the family tablecloth stained with the collective memories of family gatherings. *Longing* (Fig. 33) re-examines my strategies for representing memory and nostalgia through dowry lace collections and heirlooms. *Upturn* (Fig. 35) reveals the underside of a migrant's

reverse memory, a 'going back' to search for meaning and *Remember* (Fig. 36) displays the familial stitching of monogrammed ownership with links to the rituals associated with a lifetime of Sundays.

While critical decisions were made based on my artistic aptitude to compose a painting, some decisions were made simply by instinct. These paintings have contributed to my field of practice wherein I have persistently explored dowry objects belonging to Tasmanian migrants before their probable dispersion and loss. By capturing these migratory objects in paint ensures another section of Tasmania's cross-cultural history is recorded.

Somers' (2010) quote affirms my faith in the power of paint. 'When handling paint the statement will be in the manipulation, and thus the art would be in the viewing of the painting' (p. 02).

Conclusion

I initiated this project with the premise that I explore the journey of dowry in the context of post Second World War migration in Tasmania. Through interviews with 12 migrant women and the act of painting, I have found that migratory dowry has the capacity to keep alive the culture, daily habits and memories of earlier times. The project necessitated an exploration of the meanings of memory, nostalgia and longing and the role they played in my painted imagery.

This project fills a gap in research relating to migratory dowry. I found no literature relating specifically to the dowries of women who migrated to Tasmania in the post Second World War era. While a number of artists have referenced embroidery practices of migrants in Australia in their work, this project has specifically explored the significance of migratory dowry as it relates to Tasmania's history. Dowry collections require recognition as they are in danger of being seen as mere valueless tokens of the immigration experience, are currently in decline and now face the threat of dispersion and possible loss. These observations, combined with the advanced age of the women interviewed for the project and the probable scattering of family dowry underlines the timeliness of this project.

Dowry has the capacity to domesticate foreign spaces that often await migrants at the end of their journeys; and as a cultural practice, dowry creates a sense of

belonging between generations and ensures historical continuity. The skills required for establishing dowry collections that have traditionally been passed down through generations of women, verbally and as stitching practice, are fast disappearing. These cherished items now remain with the owners and their families and are highly valued by local migrant communities. That the migrant women's dowry collections and associated cultural practices have not been officially recorded as an important contribution to Tasmania's migration history, inspired me to document in paint and text these overlooked dowry collections.

My project is a studio–based inquiry and new knowledge lies in the painterly re–presentation of migratory dowry that commonly comprises everyday domestic objects such as woven and embroidered cloths, bed linens and lace collections.

Employing the still life genre, the submitted paintings portray the historical, cultural and emotive content embedded in dowry and offer a new way of engaging with these dowry collections via the women's untold narratives of migratory dowry through visual means. I have interwoven in the paintings their emotions of nostalgia, memory and longing through the stains of age, stitched images, fragmented embroidered motifs, unravelling threads and the wear and fray of dowry cloth. Using my *paint–for–stitch* process to emulate needlework. These strategies reflect the skill and dedication needed to complete an embroidered dowry collection.

I have used paint on linen to investigate the historical, cultural and emotional aspects of migratory dowry and exposed its significance to Tasmania's migration history through public exhibitions of my paintings that opened up dialogue about dowry and its role in post Second World War migration, be it a memory, a story, a piece of stitched cloth. Through the act of painting dowry imagery, life histories were recreated, documented and archived as stimuli for reflection and recollection that transposed dowry from inert objects to transcendent historical motifs and loaded painted images.

The author Ilaria Vanni (2013) establishes powerful connections between dowry, biographies, latent memories and nostalgia. Further, the author Svetlana Boym (2007) asserts nostalgia is both a physical and spiritual longing for the continuity of culture and memory of home and suggests that migrant's stories are the best narratives of nostalgia because migrants have lived that experience and understand the limitations of nostalgia. And Sociologist, Fred Davis (1979), claims nostalgia's influence is most positive at transitional points in life (for example, migration), as nostalgia is no ordinary memory but a form of recollection.

Few artists have focused specifically on Australian migrants' dowry, and no artist has, despite intensive research, created a painterly suite of embroidered migratory dowry. However, some artists have created works that capture the significance of particular objects linked to post Second World War migrants in

Australia. As art making strategies, contemporary artists, Sylvia Griffin's and Elisa Markes-Young's use of repetitive personal marks as an alternative dialogue and draw on memory and nostalgia via both continual and unravelling threads, myriad stitches, the placement of small stones, and both have experienced migration either personally or via family members. I have further added to this field of practice through my paintings that transposed aesthetics, senses and perception through my painting process (*paint–for–stitch*). This offered an alternative dialogue that operated as trace through a painterly performative practice to reveal memory and nostalgia through painted and glazed 'stitched' images, unravelling threads, tangled netting and stitched motifs on patterned, stained and worn cloth.

Due to the still life genre's illusory qualities, its future possibilities, its object depiction in various forms, its ability to carry nostalgic stories across time and its capacity to encourage reflection on its enrichment of form, I have incorporated these aspects in my submitted paintings in various guises. I have extended the still life's traditional symbolism that spoke of the temporality of death/life experiences, the inevitable onset of decay and the impermanence of our worldly possessions and to our lives by exploring and imagining the objects of dowry. The still life genre was an appropriate painting process to reinterpret the innate physical presence embedded in the stitched and embroidered motifs on the migrant women's dowry.

Beginning with images of embroidered dowry cloth painted in a traditional representational manner, the studio investigation gradually expanded into the painting of imagery that incorporated elements of illusion and reality. I have used linen as a substrate, to reinforce the materiality of dowry. To shift approaches to composition and to extend the traditional methods applied to the painting of objects, I have used a *paint–for–stitch* method to replicate embroidery techniques and to record in detail both the cultural and personal aspects of the embroidered dowry. I have used the traditional methods of 'plane of illusion' to create pictorial depth in the paintings and the 'figure/ground' technique to emphasise individual dowry motifs by bringing some forward in glazed bright colours and moving others backward by blurring the image. I have created background images of painted cloth overlaid with shadows and clouds and tangled net to intensify the embroidered imagery using a combination of powerful and fragile colours in a figurative language. My handling of paint, isolating emotive objects and renedred detail of the painted works produced a poetic encounter for the viewer when considering the theme of migrant dowry.

Nostalgic memories of earlier times, the mourning of displacement and its irreversibility, lie at the very core of migratory dowry. As nostalgia is the tension between memory and longing entangled with a sense of loss. I have expressed nostalgia in my paintings through the reinterpretation of the migrant women's stories and their personal dowry objects. I have implanted the emotions of loss, memory and longing through nostalgic experience in my paintings via the use of emotive colours, images of stains of use, the fragmentation of motifs, the fray of

cloth and unravelling threads to convey nostalgia. The application of glaze has given colours an intensity to initially draw the viewer up close to the surface before stepping back to view the entire image. This illusory method of painting stitched motifs can immortalise migratory dowry, for nostalgia is most specifically ascribed to personal and cultural objects.

To define how my interpretation of migratory dowry developed with each painting, I have categorised my paintings into *Phases* 1, 2 and 3. In *Phase 1*, my paintings begin as literal interpretations of dowry samplers and stacks of embroidered dowry. In *Phase 2*, I unravel the stitches and disperse the embroidered images to more strongly communicate migratory journeys as the women transition from young women into wives in a land far from home. In their later years, through meandering memories of migration and family, they search for home while growing old in a foreign country. *Phase 3* brings the scattered stitched motifs back to the dowry cloth that represent the ritual of laying the family tablecloth stained with the collective memories of family gatherings. Finally, memory and nostalgia is expressed through dowry lace collections and heirlooms. Two small final paintings reveal the underside of a migrant's reverse memory and the familial stitching of monogrammed ownership with links to the rituals associated with a lifetime of Sundays.

By transposing the women's stories and dowry objects in paint, I have transformed dowry from inert precious objects, hidden from everyday view, into

a series of paintings to emphasise the overall waning of dowry as a cultural practice. Through my reinterpretation of the dowry objects of the 12 women, this project unfolds one of the ways dowry objects carry emotional resonances that offer a tangible link to the past. Material objects, such as dowry, can be recreated in paintings in order to carry emotion and offer ways in which historical and culturally inherent embroidered images on cloth are re–presented and visualised to communicate their importance.

Through my paintings I have aimed to reflect and respond to the interconnected aspects of culturally significant dowry objects to reveal and maintain traditional embroidery processes. The nature of dowry's traditional stitch processes and cultural images have been revealed through a contemporary art practice. This thesis brings an essentially personal tradition of migratory dowry into the public domain via painterly interpretations that present alternative ways of engaging with migratory dowry. My paintings offer new knowledge about dowry pertinent to the Tasmanian community and further afield and demonstrate that painting can be an effective strategy for representing the multiplicity of meanings associated with migratory objects and the nostalgic responses to them.

This project has revealed that through further research and in discussion with the current two generations related to the migrant women interviewed for this project, further insights and ways of ensuring migratory dowry remains as

treasured cultural objects within these generational families are needed. Such conversations should also suggest future opportunities there are for maintaining dowry collections within Tasmania's cultural heritage. Further research should identify how the women's adult family members perceive the dowry collections in a modern milieu and whether a contemporary form of dowry in our current society continues as an important cultural aspect of their ancestral dowry tradition.

Through the interviews with the migrant women, extensive research and the act of painting, I have found that migratory dowry has the capacity to keep alive the culture, daily habits and memories of earlier times. Dowry, also has the capacity to domesticate foreign spaces that often awaited migrants at the end of the their journey; and as a cultural practice, dowry creates a sense of belonging between generations and can ensure a cultural and historical continuity. By capturing these migratory objects in paint ensures another section of Tasmania's cross-cultural history is recorded.

This thesis explored the proposition that painting can offer a re-examination of the importance of migratory dowry to Tasmania's history. The thesis concludes that migratory dowry can be considered a significant aspect of migration history in Tasmania that offers recognition to a gradually declining cultural practice.

Appendices

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Curriculum Vitae – Elizabeth Joan Gray.

Trial paintings (3) not in the Examination Exhibition.

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HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NETWORK

01 May 2015

THICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA) NET

Sent via email

Dear Dr Ozolins

Re: MINIMAL RISK ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL Ethics Ref: H0014895 - Bridewealth: A Painterly Investigation of Migrational marriage and Dowry items in Tasmania

We are pleased to advise that acting on a mandate from the Tasmania Social Sciences HREC, the Chair of the committee considered and approved the above project on 30 April 2015.

This approval constitutes ethical clearance by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee. The decision and authority to commence the associated research may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance from other organisations or review by your research governance coordinator or Head of Department. It is your responsibility to find out if the approval of other bodies or authorities is required. It is recommended that the proposed research should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

Please note that this approval is for four years and is conditional upon receipt of an annual Progress Report. Ethics approval for this project will lapse if a Progress Report is not submitted.

The following conditions apply to this approval. Failure to abide by these conditions may result in suspension or discontinuation of

approval.

1. It is the responsibility of the Chief Investigator to ensure that all investigators are aware of the terms of approval, to ensure the project is conducted as approved by the Ethics Committee, and to notify the

Committee if any investigators are added to, or cease involvement with, the project.

A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Social Science Ethics Officer Private Bag 01 Hobart Tasmania 7001 Australia Tel: (03) 6226 2763 Fax: (03) 6226 7148 Katherine.Shaw@utas.edu.au

Complaints: If any complaints are received or ethical issues arise during the course of the project, investigators should advise the Executive Officer of the Ethics Committee on 03 6226 7479 or human.ethics@utas.edu.au. □

Incidents or adverse effects: Investigators should notify the Ethics Committee immediately of any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants or unforeseen events affecting the ethical acceptability of the project. □

Amendments to Project: Modifications to the project must not proceed until approval is obtained from the Ethics Committee. Please submit an Amendment Form (available on our website) to notify the Ethics Committee of the proposed modifications. □

Annual Report: Continued approval for this project is dependent on the submission of a Progress Report by the anniversary date of your approval. You will be sent a courtesy reminder closer to this date. **Failure to submit a Progress Report will mean that ethics approval for this project will lapse.** □

Final Report: A Final Report and a copy of any published material arising from the project, either in full or abstract, must be provided at the end of the project. □

Yours sincerely

Natasha Jones□Ethics Officer□Tasmania Social Sciences HREC

A PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Memory Stitches: a Painterly Exploration of Migratory Dowry

Questionnaire

Participant's name:

Address:

Contact phone number/email:

Meeting date:

Confirmed date and time of meeting:

- Shown identity card
- Explained the reasons for the interview
- Given participant/s an information sheet
- Received consent to proceed with interview
- Received permission to photograph belongings
- Offered to post copy of the interview sheet and photographs.

When and where were you born?

Describe your life before settling in Australia

Dates and places of departure, arrival in Australia and early life in Tasmania

Describe your dowry/heirloom collection

Did you inherit the dowry/heirloom items and from whom?

Were some or all of the dowry/heirloom items made by you? If so, who taught you the craft traditions?

Are there important customs, memories and stories attached to your dowry/heirloom items? If so, please share them if you wish?

Which item/s would be the most significant dowry in your collection and why?

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how and why?

What traditional customs have you made a conscious effort to preserve and why?

Do you use the dowry/heirloom items or are they stored for preservation? If they are used, on what occasions and are those occasions traditional customs?

What function do the dowry/heirloom items have in your life in Tasmania?

What might be the future for your dowry/heirloom objects in Tasmania?

Expand on conversations

The Tasmanian College of the Arts, Hunter Street, Hobart. 7000.
Social Science Human Research Ethics Committee No. H0014895.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Carolina

Describe your life before settling in Australia
Italy, Naples – 18kms from the city centre.

When and where were you born?
In 1943, Naples. During the war we had a farm for support, no money but land and food. My sister and I used to go dancing and this is where I met my future husband.

What other places did you live in, other than your birthplace, before leaving Australia?

Before arriving in Tasmania, my husband lived and worked in Germany for 7 years. We were married in Italy and went to Germany for 5 months. We originally planned to go to America where a relative lived but he had 8 children so could not offer any spare space or time. We chose Australia because I had a sister living in Tasmania.

Departure and arrival in Australia
Arrived 1969. My sister had settled in Tasmania 7 years before.

Describe your dowry/heirloom collection
I made all the dowry items. My bride dress was made and purchased in Naples.

Did you inherit the dowry/heirloom items and from whom?
I inherited nothing. My mother died at 53 years. Her dowry items had disappeared when my sister visited Italy after our mother and father's death. My sister has only one large bedcover and pillowcases from the missing dowry.

Were some or all of the dowry/heirloom items made by you? If so, who taught you the craft traditions?

I made some of the items and others were purchased. I learnt embroidery at the convent after finishing school years. I was about 13/14 years old then. My parents paid for embroidery and needlework lessons for the making of dowry linen. Also, a neighbour gave lessons for free.

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how and why?
The value remains the same regardless of the years. They are linked to memories of childhood, family, Italy and my mother-in-law because we were very close. She replaced the role of my mother after she died. My mother-in-law came to Tasmania twice for extended visits.

What traditional customs have you made a conscious effort to preserve and why?
Preserving the tradition of the *Corredo, la bianchiera* (the dowry).

Do you use the dowry/heirloom items or are they stored for preservation? If they are used, on what occasions, and are those occasions traditional customs?

I used these items at earlier significant occasions, now there is too much ironing.

What function do the dowry/heirloom items have in your life in Tasmania?
Each year the dowry items are displayed along with other Italian women's dowries at *Festivalia* held once a year in North Hobart.

What might be the future for your dowry/heirloom objects in Tasmania?
I have two granddaughters and 2 nieces and a son who will take care and preserve these precious items.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Jane

Description of my dowry collection

Of British origin, my heirlooms belonged to my father, mother, auntie and grandmother. I am the end of family line but there are cousins who may inherit.

The most significant two pieces in the collection are the tea cloths – one with white and pink flowers and the falling pink petals, all thickly stitched on heavy linen. And the linen tea cloth embroidered with the iris, violets, daisies and other flowers. The significance of my heirlooms has not changed over the years. The heirloom items are traditionally English based needlework with one exception. A tablecloth with oriental images (perhaps Chinese or Japanese) that may have been stitched by my family or it is an item purchased. Regardless it is obviously hand stitched. My family used these heirlooms for special occasions. I plan to store these items carefully for preservation and will occasionally use and delight in their beauty and reflect on the memories they conjure up.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Elvira

When and where were you born?
In 1936 ,Cervaro, Frosanone, near Rome & Monte Casino, Italy.

Describe your life before settling in Australia
My father was a Lord Mayor – *la paese declatura*

Departure, arrival in Australia and early life in Tasmania
See my published story (*The Mercury*, 13/2/2016).

Describe your dowry/heirloom collection
Heirloom, handmade double bed spread, at least 200 years old, exhibited at the Milano Festa. Inherited from Grandmother, great grandmother, great, great grandmother (no dates available). An heirloom – a hand-painted picture with embroidered border flowers. My nightdress was handmade by me, with intricate stitch-work at the neck and wrists of the garment. It is now a dowry item. I also made my own wedding dress.

Did you inherit the dowry/heirloom items and from whom?
From the family going back 3 generations at least.

Were some or all of the dowry/heirloom items made by you? If so, who taught you the craft traditions?
I was taught to stitch and embroider and became a seamstress.

Are there important customs, memories and stories attached to your dowry/heirloom items? If so, please share them if you wish?

See attached published story (*The Mercury*, 13/2/2016)

Which item/s would be the most significant dowry in your collection and why?
All of my items are precious and irreplaceable.

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how and why?
No, probably more relevant now at my age and my family's interest in the items.

What traditional customs have you made a conscious effort to preserve and why?
My seamstress skills remain.

Do you use the dowry/heirloom items or are they stored for preservation? If they are used, on what occasions and are those occasions traditional customs?

The heirloom and dowry objects are carefully stored but are not used due to their age.

What function do the dowry/heirloom items have in your life in Tasmania?
They are reminders of my life in Italy, so long ago.

What might be the future for your dowry/heirloom objects in Tasmania?
The family will take great care of the objects.

Summary of published story in The Mercury, 13/2/2016.
During the Second World War, the family lived near Monte Casino where deadly battles were fought between the Germans and Americans with military support from several other armies. The US army took the family to Calabria for safety reasons. I was 6 years old at the time. We lived in caves until the war finally ended in 1945. Our family went back home and found our house and belongings had been bombed, there was nothing left.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Ephrasini

When and where were you born? Born 1936, in Lesbos, Greece

Describe your life before settling in Australia – I lived in Lesbos through the 2nd World War with my family and attended school to 6th grade then learned dressmaking.

Departure, arrival in Australia and early life in Tasmania – 1957, I caught a plane from Lesbos to Athens. I arrived in Melbourne to meet my fiancé who was not at the airport to greet me. Speaking no English and knowing I was going to be living in a place called Geelong I caught a bus to Melbourne city and a train to Geelong. The handle broke on one of my two suitcases so had to carry one under my arm. I caught a taxi from the train station, shared with two women (so I felt secure) and arrived at the address but it was not the right address. After finding the correct house I was informed my fiancé and best man, for my imminent wedding, were at the airport waiting to pick me up. They were advised at the enquiries desk that the woman in question did not arrive in Melbourne. Later that evening my fiancé and best man arrived back in Geelong. 'She is here' declared a group of people waiting in the house. My gift of Greek records and Ouzo were greatly appreciated. It was a tense and muddled start to my new life and marriage in Australia.

A downturn in manufacturing industries in Australia left large numbers of men and women without work. My husband found work at Comalco in Bell Bay Tasmania so we went to live in Georgetown (Northeast Tasmania). Over the years I had three children and attempted to earn money using my dressmaking skills but there was very little demand for especially designed frocks in Georgetown or Tasmania because ready made dresses began to appear in large department stores and small retailers throughout the State. Leasing and later buying food/takeaway stores over many years, I learnt how to cook chips and make takeaway food 7 days a week. It meant my small children were with me in the shop and helped out after school.

Describe your dowry/heirloom collection
My dowry is immense and very beautiful with obvious embroidery skills. The items are used throughout my home and changed seasonally. The dowry box was sent by ship after I arrived in Tasmania. The wooden box with a blue curved tin lid is a traditional dowry box. 'The arrival of my dowry box was heavenly'.

Did you inherit the dowry/heirloom items and from whom?
My mother and older sister (by 15 years) both taught me the craft and made many of the dowry items as well as me.

Are there important customs, memories and stories attached to your dowry/heirloom items? If so, please share them if you wish?

Each piece of the dowry is a reminder of earlier years in Greece, family life in Tasmania, holidays in Lesbos (for 1 year in 1970), cultural links, Greek customs and family celebrations. The tablecloths and other linen are used for Easter, Christmas and occasions such as birthday, engagement and wedding celebrations.

Which item/s would be the most significant dowry in your collection and why?
Each piece of the dowry is equally precious to me.

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how and why?
The treasured dowry has been with me most of my life. Most are used, laundered and ironed, folded and stacked and carefully stored.

What traditional customs have you made a conscious effort to preserve and why?
Candle burning which represents the 'light at the window. To preserve traditions I read many books about history, culture and customs of Lesbos and Greece.

What might be the future for your dowry/heirloom objects in Tasmania?
My dowry is revered within the extended family because the dowry items are on display throughout my home and used on a daily basis.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Helinä

Describe your life before settling in Australia. When and where were you born?

I was born in 1945, Finland, Kuhmoinen. My surname is Nuppula (meaning place with lots of buds). There are only 45 people in Finland with my family name – some people with the surname Nuppula went to Lapland to live. My father was a shoemaker who made shoes for the village and kept a journal of foot sizes and growth. My mother managed a weaving studio with 3 looms. My two sisters and I helped with the weaving. I later lived in Helsinki, Stockholm (Finland is bi-lingual) studied to become a textile teacher for one year designing and making samplers of needlework plus designing clothes. Followed by training to become a languages teacher, World Literature and other subjects in Helsinki. I married an Australian in Finland. My husband worked for a computing firm for 5 years. We Lived in California, Sweden and later Australia.

Departure and arrival in Australia

I left Stockholm in 1971 and arrived in Sydney as my husband worked for the Sydney University. In 1973 my husband went to the Antarctic so I returned to Finland to teach while he was away. I freighted a box of goods to Australia, particularly our wedding gifts, and returned to Sydney in 1975.

Describe your dowry/heirloom collection

Many are heirlooms belonging to my now deceased mother, such as tablecloths, towels, sheets and pillowslips. My mother, in the 1950s, grew the flax, soaked the flax in the lake, separated the fibres and spun and wove it into sheets and towels. Dowry items of mine are embroidered, crocheted and woven cloth and there is a complete Finish regional national costume, an apron, Christmas samplers, cotton bags and rolls of crochet ready to sew onto bed linen. There is also Thomas's cross of wood, woven wall hangings, a Kuultokuva picture hanging that allows the light to shine through, table runners and a baby's bonnet.

Did you inherit the dowry/heirloom items and from whom?

Yes, from my mother.

Were some or all of the dowry/heirloom items made by you? If so, who taught you the craft traditions?

I was taught by my mother how to make yarn out of flax, how to weave and sew and embroider to make dowry items. Following my mother's weaving tradition, I attended a weaving and design course at the Tasmanian University Art School (taught by Mr Townsend who went to Finland 1982-83 to study).

Which item/s would be the most significant dowry in your collection and why?

The hank of linen my mother produced from flax to yarn, woven cloths, sheets, towels, cloth table runners and a collection of linen for the home. Plus the traditional 'rooster' brooch cast from a 13th century graveyard dig found in Kuhmoinan and a Kalevala Koru.

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how and why?

The relevance and value of the items has always been there as weaving and needlework is practised and valued in the family.

What traditional customs have you made a conscious effort to preserve and why?

I preserve Finish traditions and customs for my family and memories. Such items as traditional customs and designs, woven cloths plus a national costume.

Do you use the dowry/heirloom items or are they stored for preservation? If they are used, on what occasions and are those occasions traditional customs?

Some of the items are used at special Finish family celebrations otherwise the heirlooms are too precious for daily or even occasional use.

What function do the dowry/heirloom items have in your life in Tasmania?

They function as connections to Finland and family memories.

What might be the future for your dowry/heirloom objects in Tasmania?

The items are carefully stored and preserved for my daughter as keeper of the heirlooms.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Leva

Describe your life before settling in Australia
Living in Europe with my mother, father, twin sister, another sister and two brothers.

When and where were you born?
Born Riga, Latvia.

What other places did you live in, other than your birthplace, before leaving for Australia?

Cesis – Latvia. From 1945 I was in Displaced Persons Camps in various places in Germany.

Departure and arrival in Australia
I departed Bremenhaven, Germany 1950 September/October and arrived in Australia 1950. Travelled by the ship 'Brazil' to Sydney. I was sent to Bathurst Camp and later lived in Adelaide. I began living in Hobart Tasmania when I married in 1963.

Describe your dowry/heirloom collection
There are heirlooms from my father, mother-in-law and my own needlework.

Did you inherit the dowry/heirloom items and from whom?
Handwork made by my Mother-in-law and my father.

Were some or all of the dowry/heirloom items made by you? If so, who taught you the craft traditions?

Some of the items were made by me. I was taught by my parents as well as my mother-in-law.

Are there important customs, memories and stories attached to your dowry/heirloom items? If so, please share them if you wish?

My father was constantly drawing/drafting/designing of jewellery, both imagined and based on traditional images and the use of Latvian /Baltic amber. I have folders of his exquisite drawings and similar beautifully crafted jewellery. Sometimes my mother-in-law taught me needlework skills. My national costume items are worn at special cultural occasions. My Latvian culture is played out everyday, by the use of the tablecloths, table runners and other embroidered and woven cloths, surrounded by objects representing Latvia. My life is surrounded by cultural items that declare a successful melding of both cultures.

Which item/s would be the most significant dowry in your collection and why?
All of them.

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how and why?
Not really.

What traditional customs have you made a conscious effort to preserve and why?
Singing, dancing, needlework and books because our family still speak and read the Latvian language.

Do you use the dowry/heirloom items or are they stored for preservation? If they are used, on what occasions and are those occasions traditional customs?

I use them as much as possible. Especially at big functions.

What might be the future for your dowry/heirloom objects in Tasmania?
Hopefully, passed onto my grandchildren.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Eleni

Describe your life before settling in Australia
I was born in 1936. My parents are from Kythera, Greece.

What other places did you live in, other than your birthplace, before leaving Australia?

I had 10 months holiday in Kythera (home of my parents) during the 1953 Olympic Games held in Greece and returned for holidays in 1973, 1980, 2006. The dowry box/chest/truck and collection of dowry item. Some of my items are kept in a Sandalwood box purchased in Colombo.

Did you inherit the dowry items and from whom?
Yes, from my father, mother and from mother-in-law.

Were some or all of the dowry items made by you? If so, who taught you the craft traditions?

Yes, I learnt needlework from local girls while on Kythera for 10 months in 1953.

Are there important customs, memories and stories attached to your dowry items? If so, please share them if you wish?

I share with the women of my family (matrilineal) down the line these dowry items and heirlooms as there are too many for one person. My two daughters are the keepers.

Which item/s would be the most significant dowry in your dowry collection and why?
The pillowcase with needlework entwined initials and lace work that came from my grandmother. Also an icon with a black face Madonna from Kythera. A gold, jewelled cross which was a christening gift, inscribed (19/3/37). I was christened on the same day with my older brother although I now belong to one Greek Church and my brother to another.

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how

and why?
I believe natural aging draws value into the items.

What traditional customs have you made a conscious effort to preserve and why?

- Kythera customs – the dying of eggs red and the 'tsourek' Easter bread.
- 'Best not hand soap to a person (may lead to a fight)'.
    - Take a plate of food when invited to another person's home – when one receives food one must return the plate with food.
    - At weddings, the new bed sheets are used to make the bed that is scattered with sugared almonds (koufeta/confetti) and dollar bills plus roll a baby over the bed to encourage fertility.
    - At christenings the godparents provide a box and fill it with baby clothes, bath sheets, soap, nappies and pins and a cross. The baby is annointed by lathering the skin with olive oil.

Do you use the dowry items or are they stored for preservation? If they are used, on what occasions and are those occasions traditional customs?

I use doilies (the hard wearing type). The children when small wore the traditional costumes, on special occasions.

What function do the dowry items have in your life in Tasmania?
The 'black face Madonna' icon is used on a special day set aside for Icons. Such icons are carried and paraded around the church, completing the cycle inside the church.

What might be the future for your dowry objects in Tasmania?
My two daughters are the keepers and probably the next generation of females**.** I have received expert advice on how best to store the precious items and I follow that advice.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Victoria

Describe your early life

I was the first child of a Jewish father who trained as a textile designer in a slave labour camp from 1938-39. He was later death marched to Mauthausen. He survived Typhus. He departed Hungary in 1947 and arrived that same year in Melbourne.

Describe your heirloom collection

I inherited heirloom items from my father. I have fabric woven by my father; his extensive workbooks from textile school in Hungary; his numerous photographs of his fashion garments and photographs of his marriage.

Are there important customs, memories and stories attached to your heirloom items? If so, please share them if you wish?

Work was the most important part of my father's life. Veiling the trauma, he kept himself occupied day and night. The 'warp and weft' sounds of the loom blocked out any past thoughts & memories in his head.

Which item/s would be the most significant heirlooms in your collection and why?

My father's fabrics and the workbooks filled with samples of woven cloth.

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how and why?

They have intensified in relation to my understanding of myself, my feelings of displacement and trauma.

Do you use the heirloom items or are they stored for preservation? If they are used, on what occasions and are those occasions traditional customs?

Stored.

What function do the heirloom items have in your life in Tasmania?

They focus my art works. **What might be the future for your heirloom objects in Tasmania?** Not sure.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Marika

Describe your life before settling in Australia

I was born in Lerapetra. My father was from Turkey, and my mother was born in Crete, Greece. I have two brothers and a sister. During the Second World War my parents and their children lived in caves for survival. 6 years of horror. My mother sold her *prika* (dowry linen and gold jewellery) for small amounts of flour to make bread. And captive Italian soldiers in Crete traded pots of spaghetti, bread and cigarettes. My older brother was 14 years and myself 12 years when our father died. I lived mostly with my grandmother and my Auntie in Crete where I completed my high school education. One of my brothers migrated to Australia and lived in Tasmania.

Describe your departure, arrival in Australia and early life in Tasmania

I migrated in 1958 by aeroplane to Tasmania to meet with my elder brother. I persistently sought work and after 3 days of asking the Swallows Biscuit factory gave me a job. I met my future husband in Tasmania who arrived in Tasmania 1956 to work for the Hydro-Electric Commission and within 4 months (1959) were married. We placed a deposit on a house in Bowen Road, Moonah and rented rooms for families to cover our expenses. My first baby was born in 1960 and further babies followed in 1961 and 1970. We worked as shopkeepers and bought land in Sandy Bay and built a house in 1970 where I currently reside. My mother visited Tasmania once. My grandmother, I spent my childhood with, died at 106 years of age. My husband died at 61 years of age. I have 3 adult children, 8 grandchildren and 3 great grandchildren.

Describe your dowry/heirloom collection

I have a collection of linen and embroidered cloths - some with traditional Cretan images.

Did you inherit the dowry/heirloom items and from whom?

No, because my mother's dowry was sold for food during the Second World War.

Were some or all of the dowry/heirloom items made by you? If so, who taught you the craft traditions?

Because I learnt sewing and embroidery as a young girl at school and from my grandmother, I created a dowry but did not make most of it.

Do you use the dowry/heirloom items or are they stored for preservation? If they are used, on what occasions and are those occasions traditional customs?

The dowry items are stored and mostly no longer used due to practical changes in daily living and special occasions.

What might be the future for your dowry/heirloom objects in Tasmania?

I consider the possibility that family members may realise the importance of keeping the dowry items even if they are dispersed amongst my large generational family.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Katina

These are but a few pieces from my dowry collection I treasure including my wedding dress. Also the pillow sham with the needlework initials edged with handmade lace and the Greek Icon from Kythera. These matrilineal dowry items from my grandmother and mother I share with the women of my Greek family – my mother, sister and my daughter, as there are too many dowry pieces to be responsible for. Tradition decrees, they must be kept within the family.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Eulalia

Describe your life before settling in Australia

I was born in the same Italian village as my husband in 1940. We were engaged from 1953-58 (I was engaged at 13 years of age to my prospective husband who was 23 years). He left for Australia in 1956 (at 26 years of age). I remained in San Benedetto dei Marsi and married by proxy in 1958. Soon after I sailed from Genoa to Melbourne by ship. The male and female passengers remained separated on board to protect the virtue of the women. I arrived in Melbourne December 1958. My husband came to Tasmania by plane in May 1959 and lived with an Italian family for a while in Hobart. They used to go to the Italian Club and later bought a house, around the corner from the club, for 3,500 Australian pounds.

There are photographs of my proxy wedding ceremony and the bride being given away by my uncle with another relation as the best man kneeling at the church alter with my uncle and a photograph of me walking arm in arm through the village with my uncle after the proxy ceremony. No photographs exist of my husband's proxy marriage in Australia. But the ceremony was similar to mine. He was married in a church with a substitute 'bride' and best man. In 1967, as a family we returned home to Italy for a visit with our children.

Are your dowry items kept in the original dowry chest, trunk, suitcase or box?

There is no actual box. The dowry linen is kept in an Italian credenza.

Describe your dowry collection

It comprises linen for the dining table, settings from 12 to 16 people, embroidered and 'cut' embroidery tablecloths, table napkins, crochet bedspread, linen runners with crochet edges. Most of the dowry items were inherited from my mother and other items embroidered by myself. Traditional skills were passed down to the girls from the female family members.

Are there important customs, memories and stories attached to your dowry items? If so, please share them if you wish? They keep me close to my Mama.

Which item/s would be the most significant dowry in your dowry collection and why?
My favourite is a linen tablecloth and matching (12) serviettes because of the embroidered pattern. Also baby cot sheets and pillow covers made by her grandmother, blue for the boys and pink for the girl. The most significant item was her bridal dress and hat made by her cousin from her home village. The dress is very torn and the hat misshapen due to 'dress-ups' by the daughter as a young girl.

Has the relevance and value of the items altered over the years? If so, how and why?
They have always been valued. The linen has been used on special occasions but now they are used less because they are getting old and the process of washing, starching, damping down, ironing and folding to put away the special pieces of linen is physically too much.

What traditional customs have you made a conscious effort to preserve and why?
My family have retained the Italian language and customs such as growing, preserving and cooking the produce, sharing stories and food around the table. Embroidery is no longer practised.

What might be the future for your dowry objects in Tasmania?
My dowry items will be passed onto family members (particularly the daughter) who were born in Tasmania yet all embrace Italian customs.

UNIVERSITY of TASMANIA

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (TASMANIA)

Questionnaire

Chantale

Describe your life and heirloom collections

I was born in the Flemish part of Belgium about 60 kilometres from Bruges, a lace-making town. As a child I lived with my family in various parts of Belgium and went to school in Brussels. I left Belgium in 1973 on a voyage around the world that brought me to Australia where I lived in Sydney. I also lived in California and Mexico before returning to Belgium at the end of 1978. I stayed in Belgium for 2 years before arriving in Tasmania Christmas day 1980.

My collection of lace belonged to my grandmother who collected and made some lace herself. Grandmother passed it onto my mother who gave some to me. I especially value the items embroidered with monograms of family members as I feel through them there is a direct connection to me. These items have been used over the years and I also use them. I have written a story of my family who came from a country of linen.

Fine linen
white thread
small stitches
her needle goes in out, in out... (2015).

The river Lys runs from its source in France to a Belgian town set in the Leie valley historically known for the growing, spinning and weaving of flax. This famous river has special microbial qualities considered good for the retting process that removes the outer layer of flax to make it ready for spinning and weaving she is born in this historical valley of linen. Her first breath takes in the strong smell of flax as her father is a flax dealer. Her mother installs in her a love of nice linen.

M C

M from Madeleine the sinner, arguably a prostitute, who wiped Jesus's feet with her long hair, it has been said that she was Jesus's lover, perhaps his wife?

I was born in the country of linen. My first breath took in the strong smell of flax.

Madeleine, a form of Magdalene, coming from Magdala, a village near the sea of Galilee.

I dropped out of my mother's womb rather quickly onto the white starched linen sheets.

My Madeleine was born in the late 19th century. She came from a family of brewers and flax merchants.

It was 7 in the morning mum just came back from the bathroom before she quickly made it back to her bed, no time for nurses or doctors to attend.

The *Leie* or *Lys* in French with its source in France, is the river that runs through the village. A tributary of the Scheldt, it used to be a famous river for its water that had special chemical properties that are good for retting flax. Retting, a microbial process used for soaking to facilitate the removal of the outer layer of the flax. Historically the *Leie* valley was known for growing, spinning and weaving of flax. The region was also famous as a picturesque place to paint.

These days the Leie is a very polluted river, the valley industrialized, area crowded.

Belgian linen, used by the famous and would-be famous, the best linen to paint on!

In springtime my little friends and I used to walk through the fields of slender stalks with small blue flowers softly waving in the wind.

During summer we used to run behind the trucks with their big loads. Slowly the trucks drove over the cobblestones. We picked the little linseed balls from the stalks of flax sticking out of the load.

Light pollution did not exist in the Flemish country and the night sky was still visible then. Celestial bodies could be seen floating by in the sky.

Before the industry collapsed dad was a flax dealer. We used to play in the big warehouse full of large bales. We made witches wigs from the silken fibres to wear at carnivals.

In the village, most people of the area had small cottage industries that processed the flax fibres. It was hard work. English and Irish buyers would come to town to buy and take it back to be spun in their overseas mills.
During the 1960's hard times came for the small manufactures, the industry collapsed and there was an upheaval in many families lives. Now it is a large-scale industrialized business and most flax is produced in Canada and Russia.

Mum installed in me a love of nice linen

Linen textiles are thought to be to be the oldest textiles in the world. They were the fabric of choice in Egypt.

I remember seeing the beautiful Nut, goddess of the sky, one of the oldest deities of the Egyptian pantheon, arched over the walls and ceiling in one of the tombs at the Valley of the Kings. She had 5 children.

C is for Celestin, meaning heavenly.

Ethics Final Report Approved: H0014895 Bridewealth: A Painterly Investigation of Migrational marriage

H

Human.Ethics@utas.edu.au

Reply all|
Tue 2/27, 1:37 PM
Brigita Ozolins;

Dear Dr Ozolins

Ethics Ref No: H0014895
Project title: Bridewealth: A Painterly Investigation of Migrational marriage and Dowry items in Tasmania

This email is to confirm that your Ethics Final Report was approved by the Tasmania Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee on 19/2/2018.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Jude Vienna-Hallam

--
Jude Vienna-Hallam
Ethics Administrator
Office of Research Services
University of Tasmania
Private Bag 01
Hobart TAS 7001
Phone: (03) 6226 6254
Fax: (03) 6226 2765
Email: Human.Ethics@utas.edu.auWeb: http://www.utas.edu.au/research-admin

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Given / Preferred Name: Elizabeth Joan
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Publication Year: 2018 School/Centre (eg. School of Medicine, Faculty of Education): Discipline (eg. Clinical Psychology, Public Health):
Supervisor/s: Dr Brigita Ozolins, Miss Anne MacDonald
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Giunta E & Sciorra J (Fig. 02)
Embroidered stories: interpreting women's domestic needlework from the Italian Diaspora, University of Mississippi, USA, (2014) (p. 327).
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Carol Humphrey (Fig. 05)
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Aleks Danko - (Fig. 14a, Fig. 14b, Fig. 15)
Barkley G and Harding L, 2015, Aleks Danko: *my fellow Aus-tra-aliens*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia, Sydney, Australia, p. 159, A private photograph of Danko's mother and friends with the cushion.
Image no. 84, *Ukrainian centre of the world*, a cross-stitch cushion cover 1949. Image no. 86, a framed gouache painting, a *birch tree in a field did stand*, 2006, 2 parts, 78.5 x 108.5cm & 15 x 70cm.
Aleksander.danko@unimelb.edu.au
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Sylvia Griffin (Fig. 16)
http://contemporaryartandfeminism.com/2014/12/22/dowry-linen-a-personal-interpretation-through-a-visual-art-practice
enquiries@nationalgalleries.org
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Elisa Markes-Young (Fig. 17)
elisa@zebra-factory.com
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Curriculum Vitae

Elizabeth Joan Gray - Born 1944 Tasmania

Residencies: Italy 2002 – 05, France 2005 – 06

Qualifications

2014 – Bachelor of Fine Art with First Class Honours.

2013 – Master of Fine Art and Design.

2000 – Bachelor of Adult and Vocational Education.

1982 – Bachelor of Fine Art (Visual).

Professional Experience

2018 – 1980 – Art practitioner.

2014 – 2009 – Art workshop facilitator for FibreArts Australia.

2000 – 1999 – Acting Team Leader in TAFE Tasmania.

2002 – 1989 – TAFE teacher in Special Programs.

1989 – 1982 – Researcher and Co-curator with Jonathan Holmes, *Lucien Dechaineux – a Retrospective*; researcher for *A Place for Art: A Centenary of Art, Craft and Design Education in Hobart*, Curator Lindsay Broughton; *Mildred Lovett-a Survey,* Co-curator with Jonathan Holmes*.* Editorial Assistant for the publication *Les Blakebrough – Potter*

1985 – 1983 – Honorary Research Associate for the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Solo Exhibitions (selected from 15)

2018 – *Memory stitches: a painterly exploration of migratory dowry,* Plimsoll Gallery, College of Arts, Law and Education, School of Creative Arts, University of Tasmania.

2017 – *Memory stitches: a painterly exploration of migratory dowry,* Entrepot Gallery, College of Arts, Law and Education, School of Creative Arts, University of Tasmania.

2014 – *Objects of Displacement*, Handmark Gallery, Tasmania.

2013 – *Mementos of Displacement*, Plimsoll Gallery and Entrepot Gallery, Tasmanian College of the Arts Hobart, Tasmania
2011 – *Mapping the Consequences of Colonisation: Two Southern Latitude Islands*, Handmark Gallery Tasmania.
1989 – *Distance Crowns: of ANZACS and Immigrants*, Beaver Galleries Canberra.
1985 – *Stranded,* Burnie Regional Art Gallery Tasmania - travelling exhibition 1986/87, Craft Council of Australia.

Group & two-persons exhibitions (selected from 53)

2015 – *Hatched*, National Graduate Show, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) West Australia, Curatorial Fellow Nadia Johnson.
2011 – *Out of Site*, CAST, Tasmania, Curator Claire Needham.
2004 – *Pilgrimages*, Zurich Switzerland.
2003 – *Antipodean Pilgrimage/Antipodi Pellegrinaggio*, Cortemilia Italy.
1995 – *Crossing Borders*, travelled across United States of America for 2 years, Australia Council for the Arts, Curators Christopher Leitch, Assistant Dean Kansas City Art Institute, United States of America and Professor Sue Rowley, University of New South Wales, Australia.
1994 – *Family: Tradition and Diversity*, Indonesia, Australia Council for the Arts, Curator Judith O'Callaghan, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, New South Wales.
1993 – *The Primitive in Contemporary Craft,* The Jam Factory, South Australia.
1991 – *Australian Contemporary Design in Jewish Ceremony*, Jewish Museum of Australia, Curator Helen Light, Victoria, Australia (travelling exhibition).
1990 – *Fabric of Australian Society*, Meat Market Craft Centre, travelling Japan, Australian regional and state capital galleries 1990/92.
1990 – *Tamworth Regional Gallery National Fibre Exhibition 1990*, Tamworth Regional Art Gallery New South Wales.
1990 – *Paperworks*, Beaver Galleries, Canberra.
1989 – *Fibre & Text 1989 Biennial*, Ararat Regional Art Gallery, Victoria.
1988 – *Classics at the Craft Council*, Craft Centre New South Wales.

1988 – *Third International Miniature Exhibition 1988*, Del Bello Gallery, Canada, second prize.

1987 – *Northern Territory Acquisition Exhibition,* Northern Territory.

1986 – *State of the Craft*, University of Tasmania, Curator Lynne Smith.

1986 – *Craft Purchase Exhibition*, Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Tasmania.

1985 – *Tamworth Regional Gallery Fibre Acquisition Exhibition,* toured Australia.

1985 – *Ararat Regional Gallery 3rd Biennial Acquisitive Exhibition*, Victoria.

1984 – *Tasmanian Craft Exhibition*, Craft Council New South Wales.

1984 – *Art Acquisition 1979-84*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Public Collections

Fine Arts Gallery, University of Tasmania.

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Jewish Museum of Australia, Victoria.

Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Tasmania.

Tamworth Regional Art Gallery, New South Wales.

Ararat Regional Art Gallery, Victoria.

Del Bello Gallery, Toronto, Canada.

Department of Immigration, Local Government & Ethnic Affairs Collection, Tasmania.

Brooks High School, Tasmania.

Zeehan Primary School, Tasmania.

Latrobe High School, Tasmania.

Queanbeyan City Centre Council, New South Wales.

The Tamar Collection, Tasmania.

Victoria College of the Arts, Victoria.

Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board.

The Commonwealth Bank, Hobart, Tasmania.

Hatfield House Historic Site, England, UK.

Tasmanian Archives.

Elizabeth Lada Gray, examination exhibition, 24th February to 7th March 2018 – Plimsoll Gallery, College of Arts, Law and Education, School of Creative Arts, University of Tasmania.

Exhibition layout

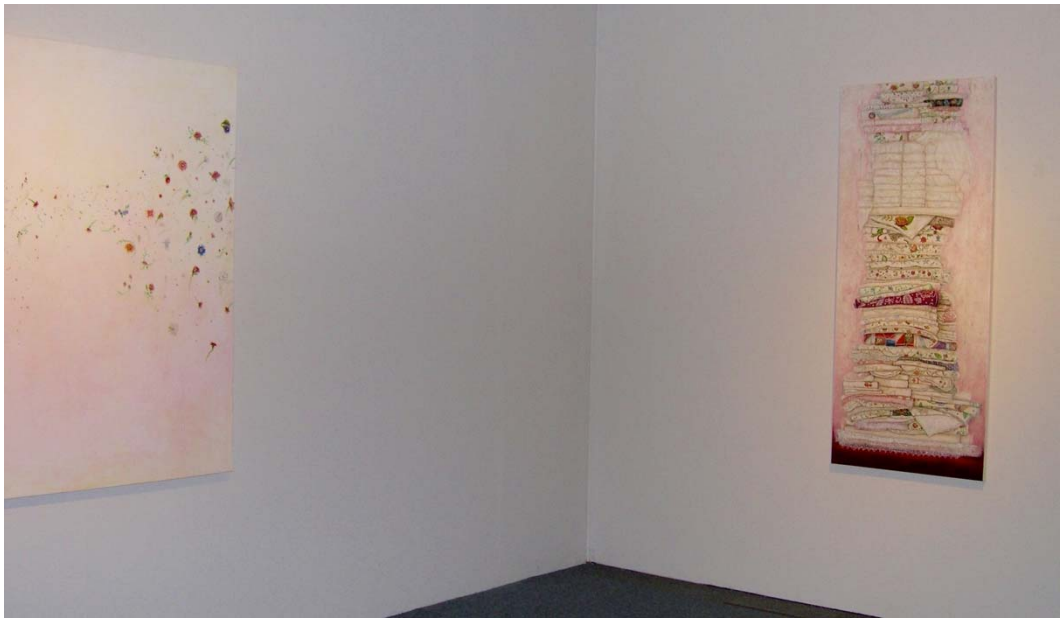
(Left to right)
Fig. 35. *Upturn* (2017), oil on linen, 20 x 20cm.
Fig. 36. *Remember* (2017), oil on linen, 20 x 20cm.
Fig. 21. *Yearning* (2015), oil on linen, 124 x 65cm.

(Left to right)
Fig. 21. *Yearning* (2015), oil on linen, 124 x 65cm.
Fig. 22. *History* (2016), oil on linen, 150 x 100cm.

(Left to right)
Fig. 22. *History* (2016), oil on linen, 150 x 100cm.
Fig. 29. *Migrating Memories* (2016), oil on linen, 150 x 150 cm.

(Left to right)
Fig. 29. *Migrating Memories* (2016), oil on linen, 150 x 150 cm.
Fig. 27. *Floating* (2016/2017), oil on linen, 150 x 450.

Fig. 27. *Floating* (2016/2017), oil on linen, 150 x 450.



(Left to right)
Fig. 27. *Floating* (2016/2017), oil on linen, 150 x 450.
Fig. 25. *Nostalgia* (2016), oil on linen, 166 x 70cm.

(Left to Right)
Fig. 25. *Nostalgia* (2016), oil on linen, 166 x 70cm.
Fig. 31. *As breath* (2017), oil on linen, 80 x 150cm.

(Left to right)
Fig. 31. *As breath* (2017), oil on linen, 80 x 150cm.
Fig. 33. *Longing* (2017), oil on linen, 80 x 80cm.

Paintings exhibited

Fig. 35. *Upturn* (2017), oil on linen, 20 x 20cm.

Fig. 36. *Remember* (2017), oil on linen, 20 x 20cm.

Fig. 21. *Yearning* (2015), oil on linen, 124 x 65cm.

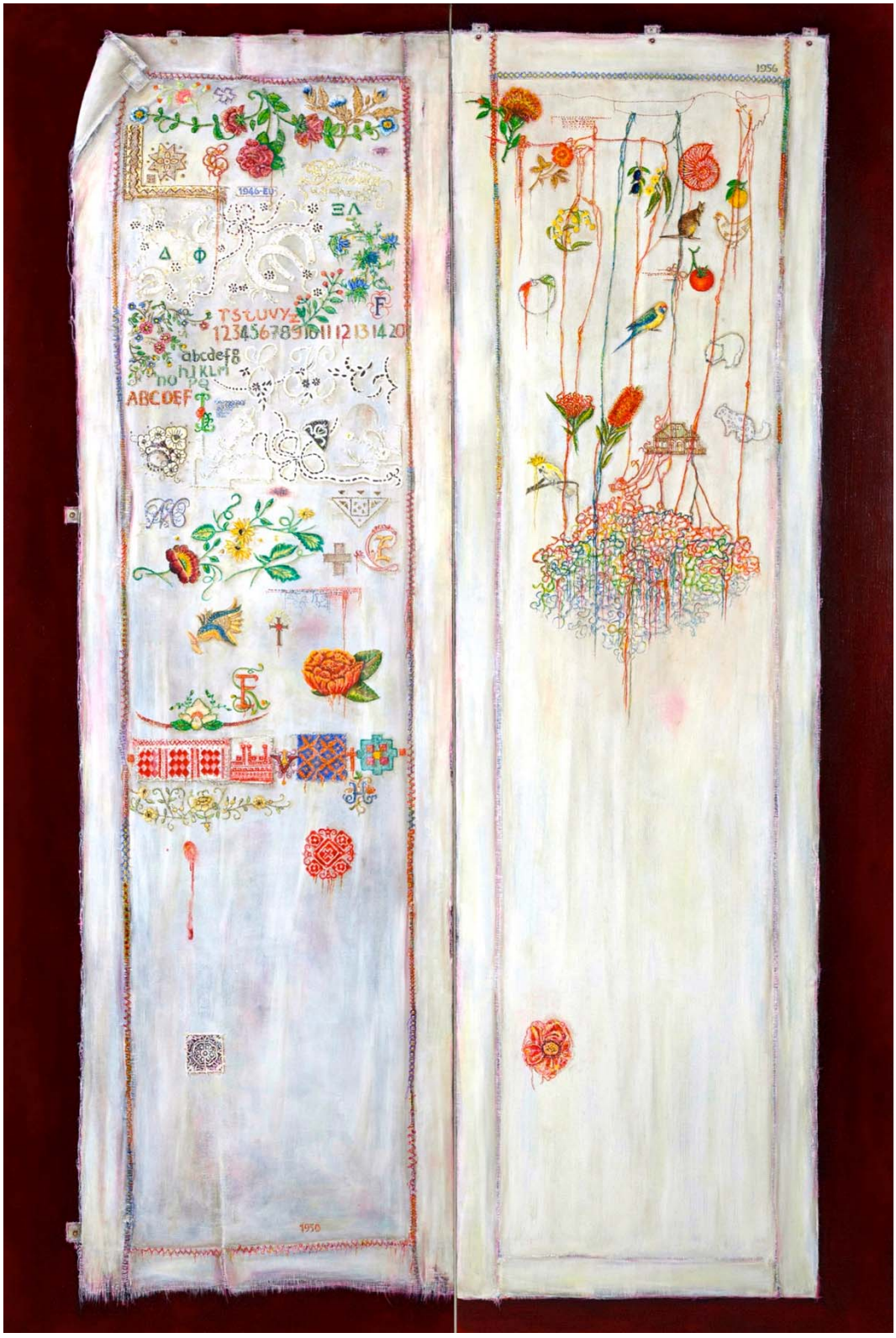


Fig. 22. *History* (2016), oil on linen, 150 x 100cm.

Fig. 29. *Migrating Memories* (2017), oil on linen, 150 x 150 cm.

Fig. 27. *Floating* (2016/2017), oil on linen, 150 x 450.

Fig. 25. *Nostalgia* (2016), oil on linen, 166 x 70cm.

Fig. 31. *As breath* (2017), oil on linen, 80 x 150cm.

Fig. 33. *Longing* (2017), oil on linen, 80 x 80cm.

Trial paintings (3) created (2016) – see also (Fig. 19a) and (Fig. 19b),

Trial painting (01), (2016), untitled, Elizabeth Gray, oil on canvas, 45 x 45cm.

Trial painting (02), (2016), untitled, Elizabeth Gray, oil on canvas, 45 x 45cm.

Trial painting (03), (2016), untitled, Elizabeth Gray, oil on canvas, 45 x 45cm.

Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Elizabeth Joan Gray